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SPECIAL REPORT: WWE vs. TNA

LET THE WAR BEGIN!

+WWE vs. WCW REVISITED?+THE ROSTERS COMPARED+
+OUR "DO's" AND "DON'Ts" FOR TNA+DOES WWE SEE THIS AS WAR?+
+THE TV NETWORK SHUFFLE+PWI EDITORS SPEAK OUT+MUCH MORE!+

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JANUARY 2006
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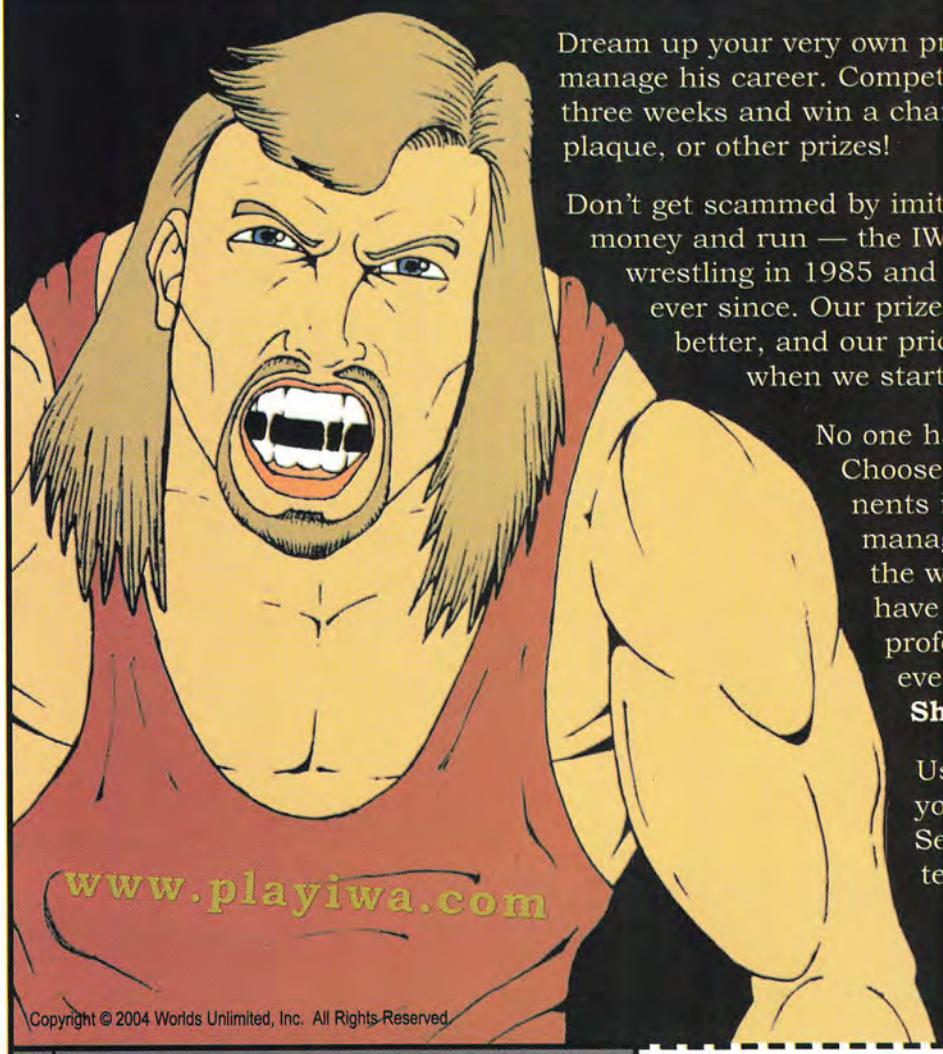

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WEAR-DOWN HOLDS

1. Airplane spin
2. Arm drag
3. Arm lock
4. Asian spike
5. Atomic drop
6. Bear hug
7. Bite
8. Body slam
9. Body tackle
10. Bulldog
11. Chicken wing
12. Choke slam
13. Claw
14. Clothesline
15. Cross body block
16. Double axehandle
17. Drop kick
18. Eagle split
19. Elbow smash
20. Eye gouge
21. Face rake
22. Fireman's carry ram
23. Flying body press
24. Flying clothesline
25. Flying drop kick
26. Flying elbow drop
27. Flying head butt
28. Flying mare
29. Forearm smash
30. Foreign object
31. Full nelson
32. Giant swing
33. Grapevine
34. Hair pull
35. Hammer lock
36. Head lock
37. Head stomp
38. Hip roll
39. Irish whip
40. Knee drop
41. Leg lock
42. Leg sweep
43. Manager interference
44. Monkey flip
45. Overhead toss
46. Pole ram
47. Reverse chin lock
48. Rolling scissors
49. Rope burn
50. Russian sickle
51. Savate kick
52. Scissors grip
53. Shoulder breaker
54. Slingshot
55. Snap mare
56. Step-over toe hold
57. Suplex
58. Surfboard
59. Turnbuckle smash
60. Wrist lock

SET-UP HOLDS

61. Abdominal stretch
62. Avalanche
63. Backbreaker
64. Backroll press
65. Belly to belly
66. Big splash
67. Boston crab
68. Brain buster
69. Camel clutch
70. Cobra clutch
71. Cradle
72. Crucifix
73. DDT
74. Figure four
75. Flying leg drop
76. Gourd buster
77. Hurricanrana
78. Moonsault
79. Neckbreaker
80. Piledriver
81. Power bomb
82. Power slam
83. Scorpion deathlock
84. Sleeper
85. Slingshot suplex
86. Spine buster
87. Stunner
88. Sunset flip
89. Superplex
90. Texas cloverleaf

YOUR NAME (PRINT NEATLY)

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CITY, STATE, ZIP CODE

WRESTLER'S NAME (DO NOT USE ANY REAL PRO WRESTLER NAMES)

WEAR-DOWN HOLDS: *Choose 10 of the holds at the left numbered 1-60. Only use a hold once.*

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____

6 _____ 7 _____ 8 _____ 9 _____ 10 _____

SET-UP HOLDS: *Choose 5 of the holds at the left numbered 61-90. Only use a hold once.*

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____

FINISHING HOLD: *Create your own custom final maneuver or choose a hold from our list.*

from the desk of...

THE TRUE WRESTLING fan within me surfaced as I read Dan Murphy's insightful analysis of the new wrestling war, pitting WWE against TNA, beginning on page 26. This is exciting stuff.

But after digesting Dan's 3,700 words, my stomach was left with a little bit of a queasy feeling. What if Total Nonstop Action cannot sustain itself? The success of TNA is anything but a given. Remember, this company is working on its third business model in three years. The first two—weekly PPVs and time buys on Fox Sports Net—can only be described as dismal failures. A lot of money has already been drained, and as well-off as the Carter family is, they are not Time Warner. As owners of a privately held company, the Carters may not have to answer to angry stockholders, but it is their money that they are losing. They saved the company from bankruptcy and they're hanging in there (probably because daughter Dixie is president), but their patience will run dry long before they allow their bank account to do so.

I am not forecasting gloom and doom. In fact, I'll state for the record that I think TNA is not only going to be operating in the black within six months, but also help usher in a new era in the business that will benefit everybody, from the mighty WWE to the lowest independent. With that out of the way, allow me to get back to the premise of this column.

I'm afraid, very afraid. What if I'm wrong? What if TNA cannot deliver on its early promise and the ratings begin to slip? If TNA fails now, any thought of a two-party system in professional wrestling will have to be put aside, perhaps forever. For TNA, there will be no Plan D; there are no excuses. They have their national contract now. Of course, that 11 o'clock Saturday night time slot is pretty dreadful, but according to a source at Spike, executives there are thrilled with the early results and are already formulating a plan to move *Impact* to prime time next year. Even in its current time slot, *Impact's* ratings compare favorably to most of the network's prime time programming. Moving the show into a more desirable slot (according to my source, not in direct competition with *Raw* and *Monday Night Football*) can only make the number even better.

If *Raw* is doing a 4, would a 2.5 be unrealistic? Consider: TNA offers a terrific product, and now has a means to bring that product to potential customers. Those two factors, along with solid management, form the basic foundation on which a business can thrive. At the height of its success, WCW had all three. At the time of its demise, it had one. My favorite part of Dan Murphy's article is the part in which he urges TNA management to read the books that describe The Rise And Fall Of The WCW Empire and learn from their mistakes.

Meanwhile, up Stamford way, I wonder if Vince McMahon TiVos *Impact*. He must. Vinnie Mac is as turned on by the prospect of competition as his viewers are by a bra and panties match between Candice Michelle and Ashley. Vince is at his best when his competitive juices are flowing. And if his people can't pick up on that and react, he won't hesitate to replace them with people who can. He might not be as inspired to war with Dixie Carter as he was Ted Turner, and he certainly will not have an opportunity to claim underdog status, but after going four years without a legitimate competitor, he's licking his lips at the prospect of devouring any foe.

Happy days!

Stu Saks
Publisher

Pro Wrestling Illustrated

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Pro Wrestling Illustrated (ISSN: 1043-7576), Vol. 27, No. 1, January 2006, is published 10 times a year, including a special issue and six double issues, by London Publishing Co., 6198 Butler Pike, Suite 200, Blue Bell, PA 19422. Periodicals postage paid at Blue Bell, PA 19422, and additional post offices. Postmaster: Send change of address notices to: Pro Wrestling Illustrated, P.O. Box 2085, Marion, OH 43306-8185. Single copy price $8.95 ($10.75 in Canada, £295 in U.K.). Subscription price $78.50 in the U.S. ($98.25 in Canada and remaining countries). Not responsible for the loss or non-return of unsolicited articles or photographs, which will not be returned unless accompanied by a self-addressed envelope bearing the proper amount of postage.

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Printed in U.S.A.

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January 2006

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COVER PHOTOS:
John Cena by George Napolitano
A.J. Styles by Vern Verna

COVER DESIGN:
Greg Stevens

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before the bell

Compiled by Will Welsh

The Ultimate Burial

If nothing else, after watching the WWE-produced *Self-Destruction Of The Ultimate Warrior* DVD, you should develop a greater appreciation for the in-ring skills of Chris Masters, Heidenreich, and Snitsky.

Slow and sluggish as they might be at times, we have a feeling that if in 2020, we pop in a tape of some of their matches from this year, they'll hold up a little better than the best (?) of Warrior from the early-1990s.

It's no wonder there are only five matches on the DVD, including his debut match on *WWF Wrestling Challenge* (a squash of Terry Gibbs). You might find yourself making good use of your fast-forward button here.

But the actual story of the Warrior—*WWE's* story of the Warrior—is interesting … in a train wreck sort of way. You'll likely be wondering after viewing the DVD's first few chapters, *Could he really have been* ***that*** *bad?*

Well, according to WWE, he was.

Take out the occasional semi-positive remark from the likes of Ted DiBiase and Chris Jericho, who calls him "underrated as an actual wrestler," and there wasn't much good about him on this DVD. Consider the following highlight (or lowlight) quotes:

From Vince McMahon: "If someone could come from another planet and arrive here on this planet, it would be [Warrior]."

From Jim Ross: "The Ultimate Warrior's interviews needed to be subtitled so they could be interpreted to the normal human being."

From Sgt. Slaughter: "He was out in outer space basically. He was kinda like talking with Darth Vader."

From Bobby Heenan (who revels in ripping Warrior to an almost embarrassing degree): "He knew nothing … nothing about wrestling."

Yikes.

There are plenty of classic nonsensical Warrior interview clips and funny road stories—Heenan' s tale of how Andre the Giant kept Warrior in line during their feud in particular—and just enough clumsy match footage to keep you both entertained and confused. You'll wonder both why McMahon kept rehiring him if he presented so many problems (he claims it was his "responsibility to our audience") and just how he got us to buy him as such a megastar.

Did we mention that WWE buries him throughout?

Although his frenetic ring entrance is still electric 15 years later, Edge remarks that he probably got tired sprinting to the ring. Jerry Lawler gets in a few digs at Warrior, plus one at another WWE outcast, Randy Savage, when he opines that, "Neither one of them made any sense" during their feud. But we can't figure out why "The King" was so upset at Warrior for having the gall to wear a baseball cap for a tete-a-tete with him in the ring on *Raw* in 1996.

Just as filmmaker Michael Moore's *Farenheit 911* could hardly be called an objective look at George W. Bush's presidency, *The Self-Destruction Of The Ultimate Warrior* is no even-handed examination of Warrior's career. Both were intended to be hatchet jobs from the start.

This is one heck of a hatchet job, complete with a few simple explanations for what had to have been complicated situations. One of Warrior's departures from the WWF, for example, was described by McMahon this way: "We had established a very stringent drug policy, and there was a violation." That's it.

Yes, the legacy-obsessed Bret Hart probably made the right decision in agreeing to work with WWE on *his* career retrospective DVD.

Mostly on entertainment value, we give this three suplexes out of five.

—Dave Lenker

Talkin' Trash

Here's a list of the top 10 wrestling-related items you've been talking about lately, and our gut reaction to each.

10. *The Star* reports that Stacy Keibler is competing for the same man with Jennifer Aniston. Lucky blankety-blank.

9. The Rock stars in *Doom*. If Mr. Johnson doesn't start choosing better roles, his acting career might be doomed.

8. Ric Flair captures the Intercontinental championship. Triple-H no like? Triple-H smash!

7. Team 3D makes its TNA debut. Oh how we would've rather written, "The Dudley Boyz make their TNA debut."

6. Brock Lesnar wins New Japan's IWGP heavyweight championship. So, WWE's hectic travel schedule was too much, but wrestling for a Japanese promotion is okay?

5. Stephanie McMahon makes an appearance at "WWE Homecoming." Considering that Steph got one of the bigger heel pops of the night, maybe it is time to bring her back to TV full-time. And, boy, did she look good!

4. Jeff Jarrett recaptures the NWA championship just before TNA's debut on Spike TV. Yeah ... that was a huge shock, right?

3. Hulk Hogan teases a WrestleMania 22 match with Steve Austin at "WWE Homecoming." Could be a match for the ages ... or a total bomb.

2. The McMahons remove Jim Ross from Raw's announcing desk. One word: Mistake.

1. *Raw* moves back to USA. We'll admit: Spike TV never quite felt the same as USA.

The Internet Insider

The following wrestling-related items were culled from various wrestling-related Web sites—or were they? See if you can pick out the items that were actually reported on the Internet (which doesn't necessarily mean that they're true) and the ones we blatantly made up. The answers appear at the end of this column on page 11.

1. AAA's Antonia Pena debuted his new promotion, For Women Only, at a nightclub in Mexico City. He basically used good-looking wrestlers wrestling in skimpy outfits. Pena even had the minis wrestle in thongs. Things got even more risque when Latin Lover, Shocker, and Vampiro performed a striptease after winning their match. In Pena's eyes, this kind of promotion is far more cutting-edge than a Steve Austin beer bash or a Hulk Hogan posing routine.

2. Former IWGP champion Kazuyuki Fujita is both lucky and unlucky when it comes to the size of his skull: It's far thicker than the average human's (a fact that has been verified by X-rays), so it allows him to take far more punches to the head than most other competitors. Unfortunately, most of his opponents know about his skull's abnormal size, so they think they can knee him full force in the head with a metal knee brace. In fact, when he takes a knee to the head (pictured), you can actually hear the "clunk" the striking force makes.

3. WWE executives recently had a meeting with a video game developer looking to expand on the promotion's already significant gaming presence. The developer pitched an idea of a Sims-type of game in which players would be able to walk WWE-licensed characters through their daily routines, including everything from waking up in the morning, eating meals, using the bathroom, showering, and wrestling in matches. WWE execs initially liked the idea, but when the game developer said that he also wanted to include options such as late-night partying, they quickly excused themselves and had the developer escorted out of WWE headquarters.

4. TNA manager Scott D'Amore, who is also part of the promotion's booking committee, had co-workers talking behind his back after pitching the idea of giving New Japan's Masa Chono a chance to win the NWA title prior to the promotion's debut on Spike TV. D'Amore reportedly fell in love with Chono's gimmick during Chono's multiple runs with WCW in the late-1990s and thought that he'd be a great, imposing champion that would draw significant mainstream interest. His vision included Chono hiring former WCW manager Sonny Ono as his interpreter. When a fellow member of the booking committee suggested that they also bring in former WCW wrestler Glacier as his partner, he realized he was being mocked and dropped the idea entirely.

Bizarro 12 Questions With ... The Ultimate Warrior

We value our health, which is why that there are certain questions that we'd never ask certain professional wrestlers during an interview. These are those questions:

12. You seem especially bitter toward Triple-H. Did you have a little crush on Stephanie McMahon or something?

11. You're Web site rants can be rather, *uh*, voluminous. Have you ever heard that less is more?

10. We've all heard the rumors that you died and that after your death, someone else donned the Warrior face paint. Can you address this rumor? Have you ever died?

9. What the heck is a Dingo Warrior?

8. Is it possible for a person to take himself too seriously?

7. One Warrior Nation never really had its moment in the sun, did it?

6. Feel like showing us what you would like to do to Vince McMahon if you were ever in the same room with him again?

5. How come when people mention the greatest wrestlers of all-time, guys like Hulk Hogan, Ric Flair, The Rock, and Steve Austin always get mentioned and you never do?

4. Do you get strange looks from people when you introduce yourself as Warrior?

3. Ever thought that if Lex Luger had put on face paint, tied strings around his arms, and ranted manically that he could've beaten you at your own game?

2. Have you appreciated the coverage we've given you in recent years?

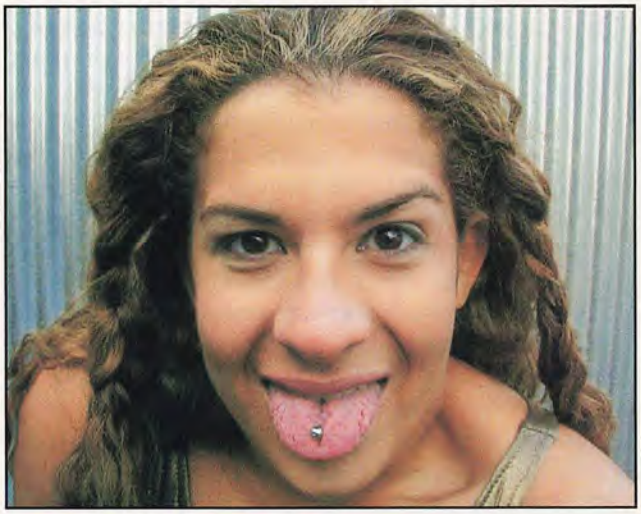
And the number-one question that we'd never ask The Ultimate Warrior:

1. You're a Democrat, right?

We Heard That!

"You [Triple-H] tried to replicate everything about me. It was The Ultimate Warrior intensity and look you strove for."

—The Ultimate Warrior, unleashing some vitriol on Triple-H in the days after the release of *The Self-Destruction Of The Ultimate Warrior* DVD



"I just kind of stopped wrestling. I didn't want to wrestle. I was kind of burned out before whenever I was in the company, so I just needed a little time off, to relax, and get my mind back together."

—Former *Tough Enough* champion Nidia, commenting on her state of mind prior to her release from WWE, in an interview with the *Voice Of Wrestling*

"I probably would have lost the over/under for Eric's tenure here, but I am happy he has succeeded with the company."

—Jim Ross, seemingly admitting that he didn't think Eric Bischoff would last as long with WWE has he has, in his "Ross Report" column on wwe.com

"It kind of sucks when there's all these muscleheads in there and there aren't any cool-looking rockers who aren't all jacked up. I think it'd be a dull show if everybody was all jacked up in great shape and had abs of steel. Different dimensions and different shapes is always good."

—Cool-looking rocker Jeff Hardy, commenting on the positives of TNA's less-than-jacked-up roster, in an interview with the *Pro Wrestling Torch*

"I'm not too worried about it. I don't think anyone we've hired from WWE hasn't deserved it and doesn't have a rightful place with us. It's not like we're just hiring guys because they show up. That's not happening. It doesn't make a big difference to me if they want to check out our show. Everyone has been very nice and cool and very talented. But just like WWE doesn't have a spot for a guy like me and others from TNA, TNA might not have a spot for people from WWE."

—Chris Sabin, discussing his thoughts on former WWE roster members showing up at TNA tapings, in an interview with wrestlingobserver.com

September's Best

"Sherri, with a face like that, you should consider a career in radio."

—Frank G. Lloyd Jr., Richwood, WV

"Sick, Ted! No one wants to see what you picked out of your nose!"

—xjmcommissioner@gmail.com

"Come on, guys, tell Sherri my puppies are much better than hers."

—Anthony Lleras, thephoenix17@hotmail.com

"This is a $1,000,000 scare tactic!"

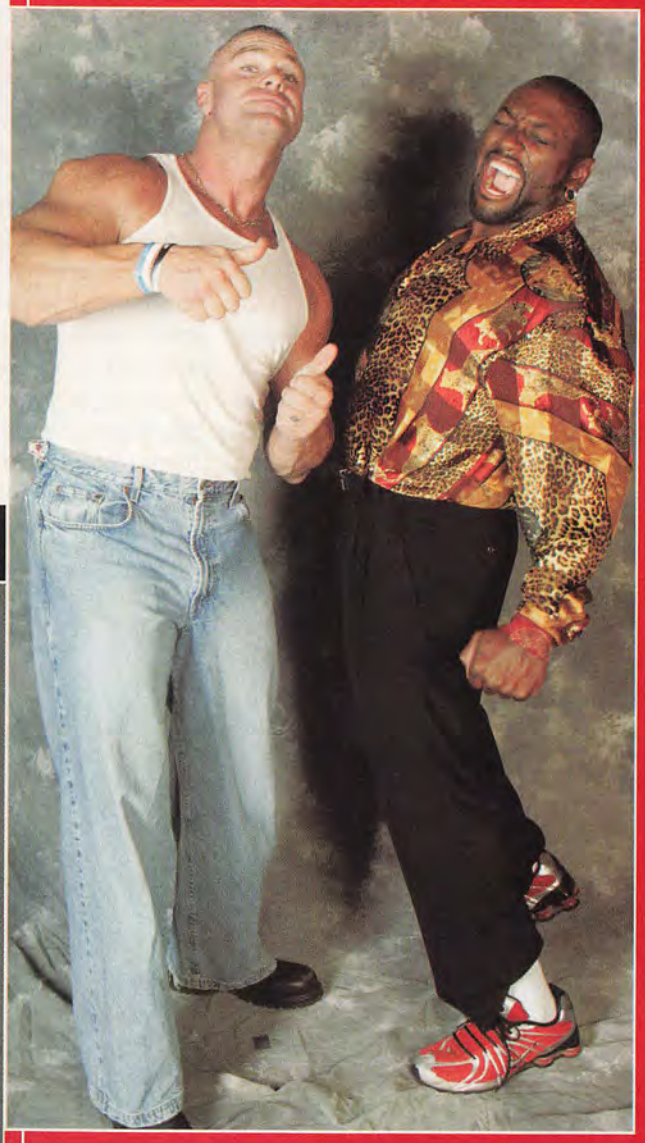
—Debbie Chmidling, Leavenworth, KS

"Back in my day, I was 'The Million-Dollar Man.' I was extremely wealthy and had a belt made out of gold and diamonds. You wanna go halves on a pizza?"

—Mike Donato, Bohemia, NY

caption me!

Think you're a better writer than the editors at *PWI*? Here's your chance to prove it, punk! This photo of Kip James and Monty Brown, two wild, wacky, weird guys, demands a short, concise, and downright uproarious caption. If you think you're up to the task, e-mail your zany quips to prowrestlingillustrated@yahoo.com, or slap a stamp on an envelope and snail-mail it to "Caption Me!" Box 1148, Fort Washington, PA 19034. Three issues from now, we'll share with you the best of the bunch—and the funnier the better.



Answers to Internet Insider:

Item 3 and 4 is totally made up.

ringside

With Will Welsh

ON OCTOBER 10, **Linda McMahon**, at the urging of her husband, **Vince**, and daughter, **Stephanie**, fired **Jim Ross** from his duties as *Raw* play-by-play announcer—and this time the firing might very well stick.

Just prior to Ross' very public firing, WWE executives, a lot of whom have long wished to replace Ross with someone younger, aggressively pursued UFC announcer **Mike Goldberg**, wishing to sign him as Ross' replacement. Goldberg eventually agreed to a new deal with UFC, temporarily dashing WWE's hopes of replacing Ross with a proven play-by-play professional while also hurting its newest competitor. However, even that setback didn't keep WWE from firing the man who is considered this generation's **Gordon Solie**.

I've never understood WWE's desire to remove Ross from his announcing duties. The man isn't just an announcer—he's the voice of wrestling. When thinking back to most of the major matches of the past 10 years or so, Ross' voice is what most wrestling fans hear in their heads. He holds an incredible amount of credibility among the wrestling public, and there's never been an outcry from WWE's fan base to replace him.

In fact, it's been quite the opposite. WWE has wanted to get rid of him before (he was fired twice previously by Vince McMahon), and WWE fans have spoken out in passionate support of him. Even then, however, one big reason Ross seemingly retained his position was his tight relationship with **"Stone-Cold" Steve Austin**. These days, Austin doesn't carry the backstage weight that he used to. Thus, Ross' firing.

As ridiculous as the idea sounds to WWE fans, Jim Ross really was fired from his job as *Raw* play-by-play man. Vince McMahon wants someone younger and more photogenic in that spot.

Just because Ross isn't the most attractive person walking the planet doesn't mean that he isn't the most qualified person to be the voice of *Raw* every week. The emotion he brings to matches he calls is genuine, and the overall knowledge and professionalism that he brings to his job are beyond reproach. In comparison, if WWE had hired Goldberg, it would have had somebody with little or no knowledge of professional wrestling or its history.

Where WWE goes from here is unclear. **Jonathan Coachman** is the logical temporary fill-in, but Coach has an acrimonious relationship with WWE fans, and they'd be hard-pressed to accept him as Ross' full-time replacement. However, WWE's best maneuver (short of bringing Ross back) would probably be to let Coach take the reigns for a few months and replace him with a fresh face in the new year. That way, the newcomer wouldn't take any of the heat for replacing Ross and could be seen as something of a savior for replacing Coachman.

Ross might yet wind up as the voice of *Raw's* Webcasts, but as of press time, there had been no official announcement about that. I hope WWE realizes its error before it's too late. Nobody can do Jim Ross' job better than Jim Ross—and for a position that doesn't require him to show his face all that often, replacing him with somebody just because the replacement is more attractive is absurd.

There's a new IWGP heavyweight champion, and his name, believe it or not, is **Brock Lesnar**.

Lesnar, whose last match prior to winning the IWGP championship was his WrestleMania XX debacle against **Bill Goldberg**, defeated both **Masahiro Chono** and defending champ **Kazuyuki Fujita** in a three-way match in the Tokyo Dome on October 8. He pinned Chono after hitting him with his old F5 finisher, which he's now calling the verdict, likely as a way to further irritate WWE after their much-publicized feud and lawsuit over whether

Last we saw Brock Lesnar in a ring in wrestling gear, he and Bill Goldberg were stinking up Madison Square Garden at WrestleMania XX. He's finally back ... and he's the IWGP champ.

Lesnar has the right to continue his wrestling career elsewhere.

The fact that Lesnar wrestled on the show, let alone won New Japan Pro Wrestling's most prestigious championship, indicates one of two things—that WWE and Lesnar came (or on are on the verge of coming) to terms on a settlement that would allow him to pursue his wrestling career overseas, or that Lesnar and his team of lawyers believe beyond the shadow of a doubt that the non-compete clause he signed before he left WWE in 2004 will be deemed unenforceable.

Buh Buy Ray and **D-Von Dudley** have made their way to TNA, but not as Buh Buh Ray and D-Von Dudley. Thanks to WWE enforcing its right to the name and the likenesses of **The Dudley Boyz**, the former ECW and WWE tag team champions have shed the camouflage and the goofy glasses and now go by the names **Brother Ray** and **Devon** as **Team 3D**.

It's a slight change, but it's enough of one to make a difference.

Watching Team 3D compete in TNA should be a treat. When they joined WWE, they helped to fuel the WWE tag team renaissance that was already underway thanks to **The Hardy Boyz** and **Edge** and **Christian**. When they left WWE, however, WWE's two tag team divisions were mostly a hodgepodge of singles wrestlers thrown together, the result of which was a pair of uninteresting divisions. The Dudleys' appearances became less special, their matches became somewhat ordinary, and they started losing their aura as one of the best tag teams in the history of the sport—which they certainly are.

Now, as members of TNA, Brother Ray and Devon are stepping into the best tag team division in the sport. They'll find themselves challenged by **America's Most Wanted**, **The Naturals**, **Team Canada**, and **3 Live Kru**, and because of this, they'll likely become more energized than they have been in a long time.

Many fans believe that WWE made a huge mistake in letting the Dudleys go; TNA hopes that those fans are right.

WWE has released **Mark Copani**, the wrestler who portrayed the controversial **Muhammad Hassan**. Following his release, Copani said that he plans to pursue a career in Hollywood. Not surprisingly, Copani said all the right things during an interview with wwe.com on his way out. You can read more on this in "In Focus" on page 16.

As hard as this is to believe, Copani reportedly had heat with some WWE executives for refusing to participate in some segments that he considered too controversial. Just imagine what those ideas from WWE Creative must have been.

Regardless of the hows and whys, it's hard to imagine that WWE ever would have been able to use Copani again. The Hassan gimmick was too controversial for anyone to quickly forget, and any appearance he would have made in the future—unless it had been under a mask—would have been a lightning rod for criticism. I have a hard time blaming Copani here, but given the way things played out, WWE made the right call in releasing him.

WWE diva search 2005 contestants **Elisabeth** and **Kristal** have signed WWE developmental contracts. Look for the lovely ladies to start in the developmental system soon. Elisabeth is heading to Ohio Valley Wrestling, while Kristal is headed to WWE's new developmental territory, Deep South Wrestling ... Don't believe any rumors you hear concerning **Jose Canseco** appearing at WrestleMania 22; the former Oakland A's star's connection to Major League Baseball's recent steroid scandal makes him way too hot for WWE to handle (I

The Dudleys—*er*, Team 3D—were furious over the fact that WWE didn't re-sign them when their contracts expired. Now that they are in TNA, they might realize the competition at least is better.

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For a few months, Sean Waltman's TNA comeback was looking quite strong. It's not certain whether he'll wrestle there again after no-showing a pay-per-view, however. But he has been spotted backstage visiting.

think) ... **Sean Waltman**, despite past problems, is still on good terms with TNA. Before TNA considers bringing him back into the fold, however, the promotion wants assurances that Waltman won't cause any problems and, more importantly, won't no-show events, as he did for the Unbreakable pay-per-view. He scared a lot of people when he went missing for several days around the time of that September PPV. Now it might be a while before he gets another chance with the company. It's unfortunate for him because prior to that no-show, he had looked better in the ring than he had in several years at least.

Finally, a sad note: **Gene "Mr. America" Stanlee**, a top star in the '50s and '60s, died on September 22 at age 82. According to caulifloweralleyclub.org, Stanlee sold out Madison Square Garden 50 times in his career. After retiring from the sport, he was an advisor and physical trainer for such Hollywood stars as **Tom Cruise**, **Tom Hanks**, and **Cheryl Tiegs**.

That does it for me this month, fans. Enjoy your wanderings. ☐

Gene Stanlee, who was billed as "the world's strongest and most perfectly developed man," died in September at the age of 82.

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Triple H (studio shot) (WWEP017)
Trish Stratus (action shot) (WWEP019)
Trish Stratus (studio shot) (WWEP018)
Kane (studio shot) (WWEP006)
Kurt Angle (studio shot) (WWEP008)
Rey Mysterio (arms crossed) (WWEP020)
Ric Flair (in robe) (WWEP025)
Shawn Michaels (slamming Ric Flair) (WWEP029)
Undertaker (falling on John Cena) (WWEP035)
John Cena (with U.S. Title) (WWEP193)
Shawn Michaels (kneeling) (WWEP170)
Undertaker (entrance) (WWEP185)
Batista (facing Snitsky) (WWEP201)
Rey Mysterio (with car) (WWEP157)
Christy Hemme (studio) (WWEP159)
JBL (in Limo) (WWEP180)
Dawn Marie (black bikini) (WWEP195)
Batista (holding belt) (WWEP225)
John Cena (Chain Gang jersey) (WWEP224)
John Cena (Word Life Shirt) (WWEP220)
John Cena (collage) (WWEP219)
Shawn Michaels (collage) (WWEP212)
John Cena (holding U.S. belt) (WWEP091)
Stacy Keibler (Bra & Panties Match) (WWEP096)
John Cena (studio) (WWEP097)
Miss Jackie (cheerleader) (WWEP095)
Kurt Angle (studio) (WWEP090)
Eddie Guerrero (holding belt) (WWEP092)
Rob Van Dam (studio) (WWEP087)
Triple H (Pedigreeing The Hurricane) (WWEP042)
Lita (in net shirt) (WWEP0066)
Tajiri (spitting at Kidman) (WWEP0065)
Chris Benoit (doing Crossface) (WWEP0062)
Big Show (bald look) (WWEP163)
Stacy Keibler (green suit) (WWEP134)
Torrie Wilson (black bikni) (WWEP191)
Victoria (studio) (WWEP135)
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in focus

By Dave Lenker

BRING BACK "THE PRINCESS"

We've now passed the two-year anniversary of the last time Stephanie McMahon appeared on WWE TV as a regular character.

The fact that I'm able to write such a sentence astounds me. Can you even remember what role she filled when she last was a fixture on our TV sets on Thursday nights? I had to think for a few seconds and check my dog-eared copy of the *PWI Almanac* to make sure.

There it is. She was the general manager of Smackdown, so at odds with her evil father that she agreed to face him in an "I Quit" match at No Mercy 2003. It still creeps me out to think about a father-daughter "I Quit" match. Fortunately, it wasn't as bad as some of us feared.

Stephanie quit in that match and as a result had to step down as Smackdown GM. Most of us assumed she'd be back within a few months (maybe weeks) in a new role. "The Billion-Dollar Princess" couldn't stay out of the spotlight for long.

Those few months have grown into two years ... and counting.

I didn't realize just how much I have missed her until she bounced down the aisle to eat a stunner from Steve Austin for old times' sake at "WWE Homecoming" on October 3. That haughty, defiant look on her face. That screechy voice. That overflowing top half.

So annoying. All so wonderfully annoying. (Okay, the overflowing top half wasn't so annoying.)

I'll probably take some criticism for writing this, but I consider Stephanie McMahon one of the great heels of the last 10 years. It doesn't take much of an effort from any creative team on this one. She's the young, attractive daughter of the most powerful and arrogant man in the history of this industry. And Daddy gave her permission to be part of the show. Who doesn't automatically want to hate someone like that, even if you've never seen or heard her?

How were we to know that maybe, just maybe, Stephanie McMahon's career as an on-air performer for WWE ended when she lost to her dad at No Mercy 2003? Dave Lenker thinks it's high time she returned to TV regularly.

While Vince McMahon has said that both of his children had to work hard to earn the positions of power in which they currently serve behind the scenes (and, presumably, the prominent on-air roles they embraced in the past), Stephanie certainly gives off the impression that she's spoiled.

Now the criticisms of "The Princess" in the past are valid. She did get far too much TV time each week when she was a regular part of the show. And she did at times make some of the wrestlers, the ones who have to sell the house show tickets and pay-per-views, look weak in comparison to her when she probably should have felt more intimidated by them at times.

That second problem could be rectified easily. The first one is a little more troublesome. If Steph is brought back on a regular basis, it'd be hard not to give her a lot of face time. After all, if she's inserted into one or more major storylines, she'll be missed if she only shows up for a two-minute backstage segment once every two or three weeks. Besides, if what she's doing is entertaining, overexposure isn't much of a problem.

Recall that Steve Austin was all over *Raw* week after week after week during the height of the "Attitude" era. I bet The Rock wasn't far behind him when it came to TV time logged. I don't remember many complaints that those two were over-

exposed. People couldn't get enough of their talents. More recently, however, Triple-H has been hammered for dominating the Raw brand to an almost absurd extent. I think the criticism there is warranted to a degree, but I also believe that a lot of people have programmed themselves to hate "The Game" no matter how much good he does for WWE.

Which brings me to my plans for Stephanie. It's time to pull back the curtain a little more and acknowledge on TV that these two are a real married couple. Not just acknowledge it, but capitalize on it. What better way to turn up the heat on Triple-H again than to show just how he gets everything he wants? Go ahead and allow everyone to see a little bit of how this real McMahon-Helmsley regime works.

You could just taste the hatred people had for Stephanie at "WWE Homecoming" that night at the American Airlines Center in Dallas. And that was when she was bouncing down the aisle. They missed chanting at her and loathing her. As terrific as both Trish Stratus and Lita have been at being heels (at different times) in the last 18 months, Stephanie takes it to a higher level and does it so effortlessly. I'm convinced she could do it all again.

Two years away has been too long.

CLOSING THE BOOK ON HASSAN

Vince McMahon alone sealed the fate of Mark Copani. He did it when he allowed footage of a group of pseudo-terrorists sympathetic to Copani's Muhammad Hassan character attacking The Undertaker to air unedited on UPN's *Smackdown.* The big problem, of course, was that it happened just after a group of very real terrorists bombed train cars and a bus in London this summer.

UPN subsequently banned the character from ever appearing on the show again after that, and within weeks, the Hassan character was symbolically killed off by Undertaker at The Great American Bash.

It was interesting to get three different takes on the inevitable release of Copani that followed.

Said Copani himself on wwe.com: "I have a great appreciation for WWE and the way they treated me. Everybody took care of me even more than they ever had to. I have a great deal of gratitude for the McMahons ... I have absolutely no grievances in the way that everything played out ... I just thought it was in my best interest, as well as WWE's best interest, for us to go our separate ways."

Translation: I'm smart enough to keep all my bridges as far away from flames as possible.

Said McMahon on CNBC's *The Big Idea With Donny Deutsch:* "Really, the reason this character didn't work for us is because of the individual playing the character, more or less."

Translation: I only have a hand in creating the characters that are successful.

Said Shawn "Khosrow" Daivari—Hassan's sidekick—on wwe.com: "John Laurinatis, head of talent relations himself, said that I've done an amazing job. So, I think they gave me the ball once, and I ran with it. And then, due to circumstances outside of their hands, I had to give it up. But I never fumbled. I know that there were a couple of times when Mark fumbled, either personally in the locker room or professionally on television with his work, but I never have."

Translation: Nothing personal, Mark old buddy, but I'll go along with pretty much whatever the boss said.

I should point out that Daivari noted that unlike him, Copani didn't have real passion for wrestling and is now seeking a career in Hollywood. "Wrestling is my life; it's in my blood. I couldn't think of anything worse happening right now than me sitting at home," he told wwe.com. "I was bred to go out and wrestle in front of fans, and not being able to do that is just killing me." Meanwhile, Daivari has returned to OVW to await further instructions. Here's hoping they both get another chance to be stars in their chosen professions.

(Have a comment or question about "In Focus" or anything else you see in ***PWI?*** *You can contact Dave Lenker via e-mail at dave_lenker@yahoo.com.)* □

We saw the last of Hassan and Daivari as a team in July, and maybe the last of the man behind the Hassan character, Mark Copani, in a ring forever. Reaction to Copani's release was diverse.

off the top rope

By Brandi Mankiewicz

If you wish to contribute to Brandi's mailbag, send your letters to:
TOP ROPE Box 1148 Ft. Washington, PA 19034
Or send e-mail to: **offthetoprope@yahoo.com**

(Editor's note: The opinions expressed in this column are those of the letter writers and Brandi Mankiewicz herself. They do not necessarily reflect the editorial views of this magazine.)

WOW, I TOUCHED a nerve with my column in the "PWI 500" issue (November 2005). For those of you who either didn't read my column or have Alzheimer's, all I did was speak my mind about the crappy state of independent wrestling. It's amazing just how many wrestlers have contacted me to thank me. Apparently, I'm not the only one who thinks the indy scene is dreck. I am truly surprised at the reception I've received just for a few words in my little ol' column. Now, I have grown accustomed to being verbally abused and physically threatened for the "PWI 500" issue, so it's difficult for me to embrace the warm reception I've received for this year's edition.

Of course, I've heard some grumblings about the list. It wouldn't be a "500" if I didn't. The negative feedback to my column emanates mostly from the idiots about which I was writing. It's always fun to listen to the chickens cackle because they were disturbed. No shyster wants to ever be exposed as such.

I will continue to expose the shams and speak my mind for the rest of my life. It's my moral obligation to do so. That's what was written in the contract when I signed up to be your champion.

Dear Brandi,

I have only one question to ask you, and that is do you think Matt Hardy is a hypocrite? I find him re-signing with WWE despicable. He was severely mistreated by WWE, and his name was further dragged through the dirt by the people who were once closest to him. Matt showed a lot of guts by standing up for himself and speaking out against WWE's methods. But as soon as Vince called, he came running back and basically told everyone who supported him he's more about money than he is about honor.

BEN SCHMACK
shmakdady13@yahoo.com

Dear Ben,

I have only one question for you: Why do Matt's actions surprise you? After all, he is a human with needs. Pride doesn't pay the bills. Ego doesn't put money in the bank, either. Maybe Matt realized that Lita wasn't worth fighting over. Why cling to a beaten up, dented, rusty car with tons of road miles and God knows how many drivers instead of shopping for something shiny and new? Sure, the seat is worn just right, but there always comes a time when that seat gets too loose from overuse. So Matt turned his frown upside-down and signed a fat new contract. I don't blame him. A wad of greenbacks is better than, well, Lita. Besides, his latest run in WWE main events guarantees that he'll be able to increase his independent booking fees by at least a few hundred dollars the next time he finds himself screwed over by a WWE diva.

Dear Brandi,

I happen to like HHH, and I can't think of very many matches he's been in that I haven't enjoyed. Most people feel very differently about HHH, and I've heard a lot of resounding, "Get him off my TV!" from several fans. When HHH

Why did Matt Hardy re-sign with WWE? Well, he's pointing to one of the main reasons in this photo. Without WWE's marketing gurus behind him, he would never be able to be bought in your local toy store ever again.

wasn't around, weren't these same fans rejoicing about him being gone?

SHANE COOPER
creedfan76@hotmail.com

Shane,

Haven't you learned yet that today's fans only care about complaining? This latest generation of humans are a jaded bunch. I blame yuppie parents for raising their children to think they're entitled to only the best all the time and to reject responsibility and alternate modes of thinking. This works for, say, education, but not in entertainment. Fans today reject anything or anyone who won't kiss their collective hiney and bide by their every wish. Triple-H is a free thinker who is more worried about truly important issues—not the fans. The typical WWE fan can't control Triple-H with a mere chant, so that fan gets pissed about it.

Letter of the month (taken verbatim from the actual letter to share my torture with you all):

Here is a stupid question and I know that I will slammed by you for it, but do you need a degree in journalism to write for a wrestling magazine?

And some things to get off my chest.....

I was pumped at first that John Cena came over to raw but I quickly became sick of hearing and seeing him.The rap gimmick can only last for so long and his promos and interviews are getting stale.I told my friends that I think he's a Rock wannabe.Plus, his finisher is boring and wimpy.it's just a stupid bodyslam.But the fans buy it. When I hear him come out I only hear the screams of females.I think the male audience will grow sick of him just like they did with Randy Orton, who I think is 10 times the wrestler Cena is.

And one more thing.....

I just bought The Utilmate Warrior dvd.The part when He came out to confront Hogan in WCW was confusing to me.What did he say that made Hogan so mad? Just because He said that he beat him at wrestlemania 6,8 years ago? Why is that a no-no? Piper said the same thing when he came to WCW to confront Hogan.What was the big deal? But Warrior does sound like a loon. Anyways,thank you for your time. P.S I think it would be a bad idea to rid tag teams in WWE. And Monty Brown: most overrated wrestler of the year. Belongs in the same group as Goldberg and Lex Lugar. Thank you.

The Ultimate Warrior shows his intelligence by proudly displaying this title belt upside-down. Luckily for us, it's also covering his face. Wait, maybe he's just embarrassed to have Vince McMahon as his boss.

THOMAS LABAFF
Norwood, NY

Dear Thomas,

There are no stupid questions, just stupid people. To answer a few of your questions: Yes, you do need a journalism degree to write for the *PWI* family of magazines. It only makes sense that if you want to be a writer that you'd get a degree in a related genre. Why bother with a degree in something like philosophy or mathematics if it's not needed for your ultimate goal?

Now, John Cena means nothing to me. He's a useless character. Sure, most fans like his little raps, but I have always found them boring. I'm hoping his star burns out quickly.

And one more thing ... *The Self Destruction Of The Ultimate Warrior* is a good example of Vince McMahon's spin doctors rewriting history. While that goof Warrior never deserves to be put in any wrestling Hall of Fame, he did make tons of money for the McMahons by somehow carrying WWE for short periods. To do an outright burial of him just shows the depths to which the McMahons will go to prove a point. □

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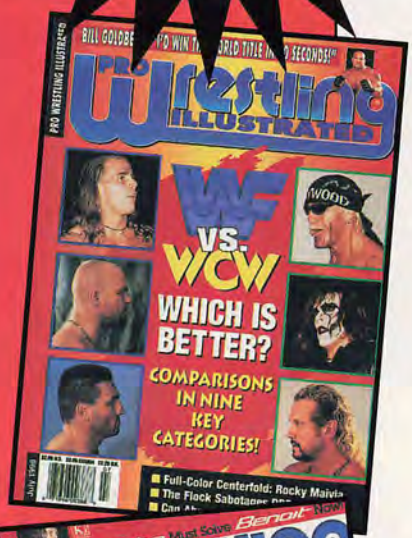

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October 1991: Sid Justice: The Second Coming Of Hulk Hogan. Centerfold: Lex Luger. Plus: Hogan-Slaughter, Terrence Taylor, Barry Windham, Williams-Bigelow.

February 1992: Has Hulk Hogan Had Enough? Centerfold: 1992 calendar. Plus: Sting, Justice-Roberts, hot prospects, Eddie Gilbert.

May 1992: Revitalized In Tokyo: Hulk Hogan Is Super-Psyched For WrestleMania VII! Centerfold: Rick Rude. Plus: Sting & Muta-Steiners, Jarrett & Fuller, Lightning Kid, Randy Savage, intimidation.

June 1992: Exclusive *PWI* Interview: Roddy Piper Speaks Out! Centerfold: Dustin Rhodes. Plus: Dangerously-Sting, Abdullah-Cactus, Sid Justice, Randy Savage.

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May 1996: Un-Natural! The WWF Has Finally Gone Too Far! Centerfold: Public Enemy. Plus: Jeff Jarrett, Dreamer-Raven, Dan Severn, Ric Flair, Giant.

October 1996: Peaking Too Soon: Will The Giant Be Ruined By His Own Success? Centerfold: Goldust. Plus: Big Van Vader, Ric Flair, Bulldog, Lex Luger.

May 1998: Starrcade Scandal! We Hate To Say It ... But Give The Belt Back To Hogan. Centerfold: Ric Flair. Plus: Mero & Sable, Taz, Taka Michinoku.

June 1998 (Special Issue): The 1998 *PWI* Poll. Centerfold: Steve Austin. Plus: Sabu, Lex Luger, Sting, Rocky Maivia, Bill Goldberg.

July 1998: WWF vs. WCW: Which Is Better? Centerfold: Rocky Maivia. Plus: Benoit, Bill Goldberg, Ahmed Johnson.

October 1998: Bret Screws Bret, Part II. Centerfold: Hunter Hearst Helmsley. Plus: Jim Ross, Marcus Bagwell, WWF controversy, FBI.

Holiday 1998: *PWI* 500. Eighth Annual Special.

March 1999: 1998—The Year In Wrestling. 1998 In Review, Achievement '98 awards, Unofficial/Official awards, predictions for 1999.

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May 1999: Who Holds The Key To WrestleMania XV? Centerfold: Konnan. Plus: Mark Henry, Sting-Nash, Bill Alfonso, Brian Hildebrand.

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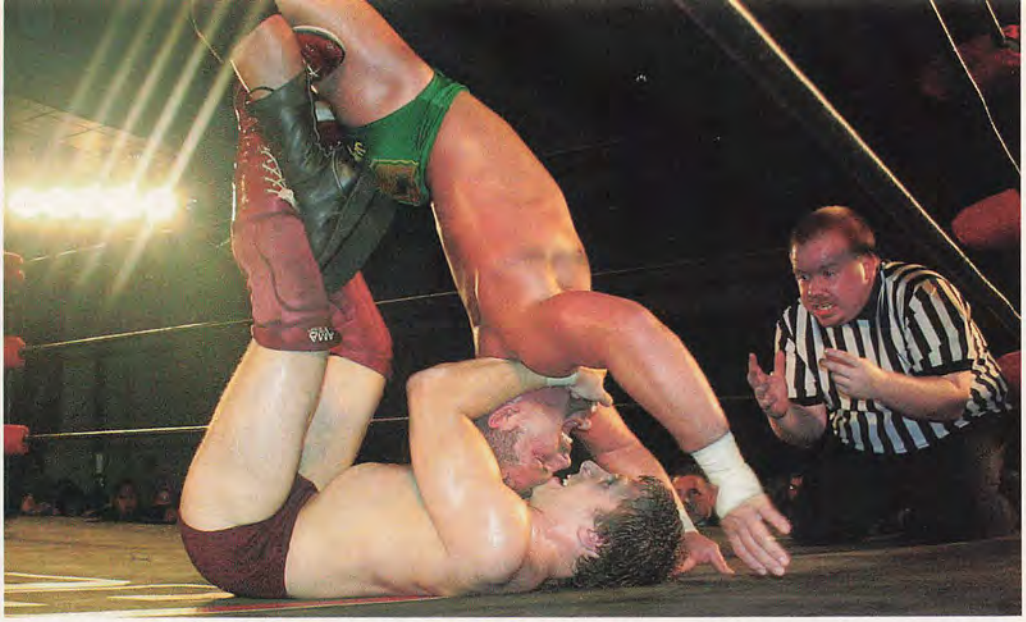


Danielson used his amazing athleticism to unseat James Gibson as Ring of Honor champion in September. He doesn't plan on making any deals with WWE or TNA while he holds the ROH gold. For now, he seems happy to be where he is.

·BRYAN·
DANIELSON

AFTER TAKING A four-month hiatus, Bryan Danielson returned to Ring of Honor with a renewed sense of purpose. Danielson would no longer be satisfied with simply surviving in the wrestling business—he was going to thrive no matter what it took. Immediately upon his return, "The American Dragon" demanded a match against ROH champion James Gibson (a.k.a. Jamie Noble). On September 17, the 24-year-old Danielson scored the biggest victory of his six-year career when he used a modified chicken wing to force Gibson into submission and win the Ring of Honor title.

Yet Gibson didn't sulk for long. He had just signed a contract to return to WWE … just as former champion C.M. Punk had signed with WWE … and just as former champion Samoa Joe had signed with TNA (while continuing to appear regularly for ROH). Danielson had noticed the pattern for a long time. Many of his peers were being signed by the two major companies while he struggled to earn a full-time living on the independent scene. Even most of his fellow students from the old Shawn Michaels Wrestling Academy—including Paul London, Spanky, Lance Cade, and Michael Shane (Matt Bentley)—had gone on to more lucrative careers in WWE or TNA.

In the meantime, Danielson accepted some dates in Japan and even more in the United Kingdom, where he toured for the Frontier Wrestling Alliance and All Star Wrestling. But the wear and tear of international travel and his frustration with the American independent scene prompted Danielson to announce a hiatus back in May. Like his friend John Walters, who made a similar announcement in April, Danielson reluctantly decided to explore opportunities outside of wrestling to try to figure out what he wanted to do with his life.

As Danielson recuperated both physically and mentally, his longing for the squared circle began to fuel his competitive desires. But is the ROH title enough to satisfy Danielson's ambition? Managing Editor Brandi Mankiewicz, Senior Writer Harry Burkett, and Contributing Writer Jason Langin discussed this and other matters with Danielson shortly after his ROH title victory in Long Island, New York.

BRANDI MANKIEWICZ: Welcome, it's good to see you back, Bryan. I would offer to throw a party for you, but you seem to have already started your own celebration. How does it feel to be the Ring of Honor champion?

BRYAN DANIELSON: It feels great, Brandi. I was a part of Ring of Honor when it first got started over three years ago, so it's taken me a long time to reach this point. But I'm glad I stuck it out and finally made it to this point. I fully intend to celebrate Ring of Honor's fourth anniversary as the champion.

HARRY BURKETT: Wait a minute, let me do the math here. Ring of Honor will celebrate its fourth anniversary this upcoming February. That means you'll have to reign as champion for at least five months. Is that your goal?

"All wrestlers, I don't care if you're Hulk Hogan, The Rock, or Colt Cabana, have to make sacrifices. And, if I have to make those sacrifices in order to get in that ring and do what I love to do, then so be it. No price is too high. Wrestling is more than what I do. It's what I am."

DANIELSON: Sure. At least five months. Anything less would be a disappointment. If Samoa Joe can be champion for almost two years, and I'm not taking anything away from him, then I can certainly keep this belt around my waist for five months. Ring of Honor is the most competitive and innovative promotion in this country. It's setting a lot of the trends that WWE and TNA are following. I intend to be the top wrestler of ROH and keep it right there on the cutting edge.

MANKIEWICZ: I wouldn't fault you for comparing yourself to Samoa Joe. After all, you nearly beat him for the Ring of Honor title late last year. I believe you went to a 40-minute draw with him, didn't you?

DANIELSON: That's right, and if I had five more minutes with him, I would've had him. I'm totally convinced of that. I know that sounds like one of those how-the-fish-got-away stories, but it's the truth.

JASON LANGIN: I know you firmly believe that, Bryan. I detect a slightly harsher tone from this mature, more seasoned Bryan Danielson than I used to hear from that up-and-coming kid, "The American Dragon." You were gone from Ring of Honor for much of 2004, but then you returned, sporting a beard and even your face—lined with battle scars I suppose—seemed older. I also detected a newfound seriousness. What was driving that?

Every issue, reporters from PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED will participate in an incisive press conference with a top wrestling star. The questions will be demanding. And the answers will reveal the innermost thoughts of the giants of the sport.

A big showdown with former champ Samoa Joe for the ROH title would draw a big crowd for sure. Size difference aside, neither man would have trouble matching the other's intensity or stamina for 60 minutes ... or more.

DANIELSON: I was becoming frustrated, maybe a little jaded, with the wrestling business, I guess. I was having five-star matches, pleasing the crowds wherever I went, but it was still a struggle. It was a struggle to ignore the daily pain, then hop into the car or on the next plane, just to abuse my body some more. The money was getting better in some places because Ring of Honor had given me enough visibility to make me a draw in certain places around the world, but I started to question whether the daily struggle to keep myself in shape and keep my name out there was really worth it. My passion for what I do inside that ring has never waned. It was just the hassle of getting there, the traveling and being away from my friends and family, and everything I went through to make it viable that made me have doubts. That's the kind of stuff a lot of the fans don't see or think about. You guys know it's not all glamorous for a wrestler.

LANGIN: You mentioned the five-star matches you've had during your career. I think my fellow reporters here would agree that you've been involved in some of the most sensational matches of the past three years. No Ring of Honor fan will forget your best-of-three-falls match against Austin Aries in August 2004. That was an epic that lasted nearly 80 minutes. So, I suppose you wondered why talent scouts didn't see those five-star matches and make some offers you couldn't refuse.

MANKIEWICZ: I hate to spoil the pity party, but there was one small fact you forgot to mention, Jason. Bryan *lost* that match to Austin Aries.

LANGIN: That may be true, Brandi, but it was still one heckuva ...

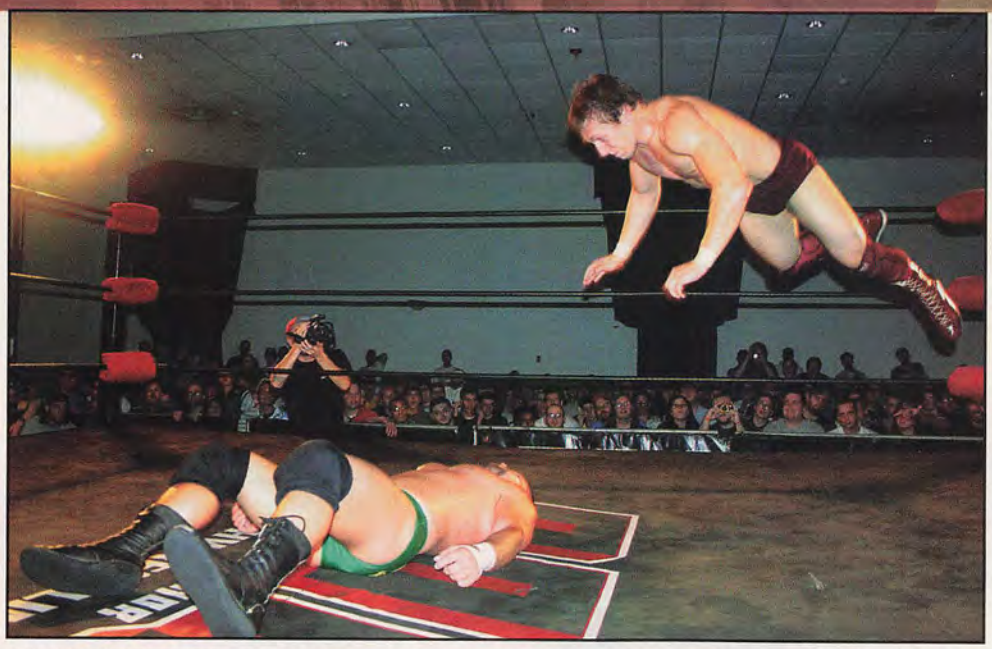
MANKIEWICZ: You're still new here, kid. You obviously didn't get the memo that I call the shots ...

DANIELSON: *Whoa,* hold on. I take your point, Brandi, and it was a good one. I'll admit that. I did lose that match to Austin Aries. Overall, I wasn't satisfied with where my career was going in Ring of Honor at the time. That's why I wrestled in Europe so much. A chance to get away from it all and re-evaluate everything.

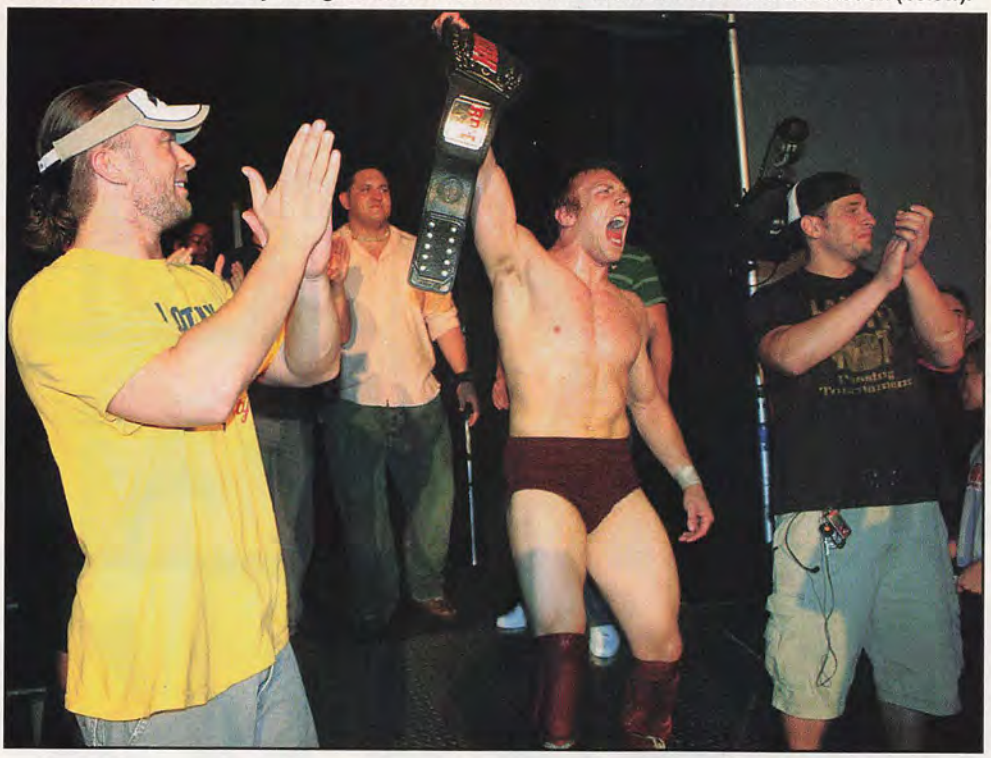
LANGIN: I want to ask you about that. How has that experience helped you get to where you are now?

DANIELSON: It was just an extension of Ring of Honor, an opportunity to face some of the best wrestlers in the world, even if those wrestlers aren't household names. In some cases, and I'm thinking of my rivalry with Doug Williams in the FWA, I had the same opponents I had in Ring of Honor. In both the FWA and All Star Wrestling, I encountered some great veterans and young guys. From Robbie Brookside to Jonny Storm, they were all tough.

Danielson, at just 24, has a wealth of international experience on his resume already. He's wrestled extensively in Europe for one, and he faced New Japan star Jushin Liger when Liger came to Ring of Honor in 2004.



Although he doesn't have a reputation for being a premier high-flyer, Danielson took to the air to beat Gibson (above). His victory brought much of the ROH locker room out for a mini-celebration (below).



BURKETT: I'm not intentionally harping on this subject, Bryan, but I want to follow up on the question of your passion for the wrestling business. Four years ago, I interviewed you for our "Introducing" feature in one of our sister magazines, *The Wrestler.* When we conducted the interview, you had just received news—that very morning, in fact—that WWE had released you and several other wrestlers from its developmental program in Memphis. I remember how exasperated you were about the situation, and you said you were headed back to your family in Aberdeen, Washington, where you would decide whether you even wanted to continue wrestling. Has this question of whether to continue wrestling plagued you throughout your entire career?

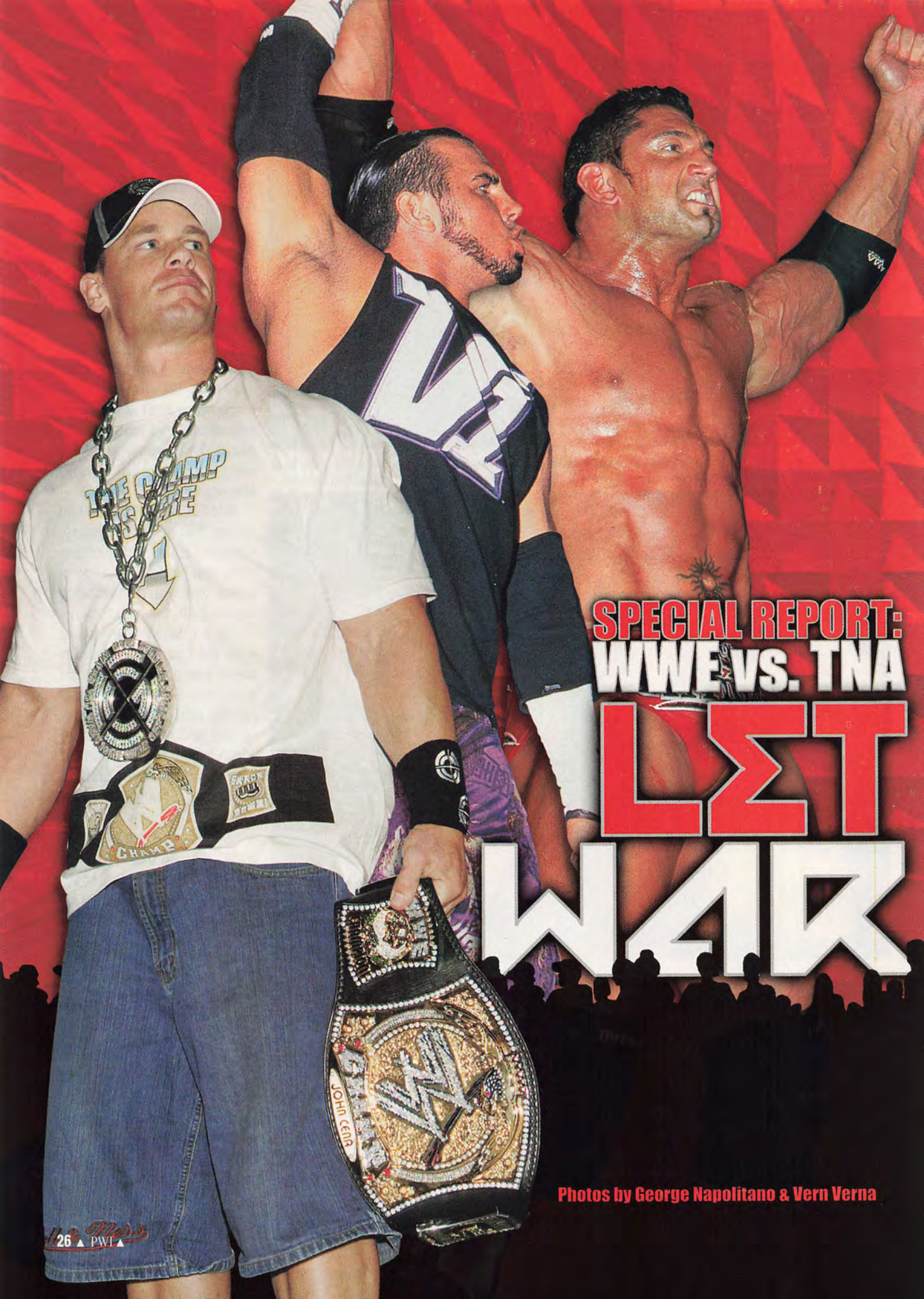
DANIELSON: Sure, but that's a nagging question for every independent wrestler out there. If you don't ask yourself that question sometime, you're not human. You're the ultimate freelancer, but your next injury can not only end your career, but could possibly end your life. Big-money deals, whether you get those in WWE, TNA, or overseas, can soothe your concerns a little bit and make it all seem worthwhile.

BURKETT: Well, Bryan, you were gone for four months. Obviously, you made some kind of decision; otherwise you wouldn't be back. What was your decision about wrestling, and about your life?

DANIELSON: I'm glad you asked that question, Harry. Wrestling is full of challenges. Yes, you're driving a lot of miles, yes, you're compiling injuries, and, yes, you may not make a million dollars per year. But I saw how much my career has progressed since I went into Shawn Michaels' training school six years ago. Spanky and I lived on Ramen noodles and became so tired from driving all over that we got sick to our stomachs. We went from nobodies to being recognized, by some people at least, as among the top wrestlers in the world. Right now I feel like I've come too far to go back. All wrestlers, I don't care if you're Hulk Hogan, The Rock, or Colt Cabana, have to make sacrifices. And, if I have to make those sacrifices in order to get in that ring and do what I love to do, then so be it. No price is too high. Wrestling is more than what I do. It's what I am.

BURKETT: The Ring of Honor title belt is draped across your shoulder as you speak. Has that vindicated your decision to come back?

DANIELSON: Absolutely. But let me be clear about it: I'm here to stay, belt or no belt. □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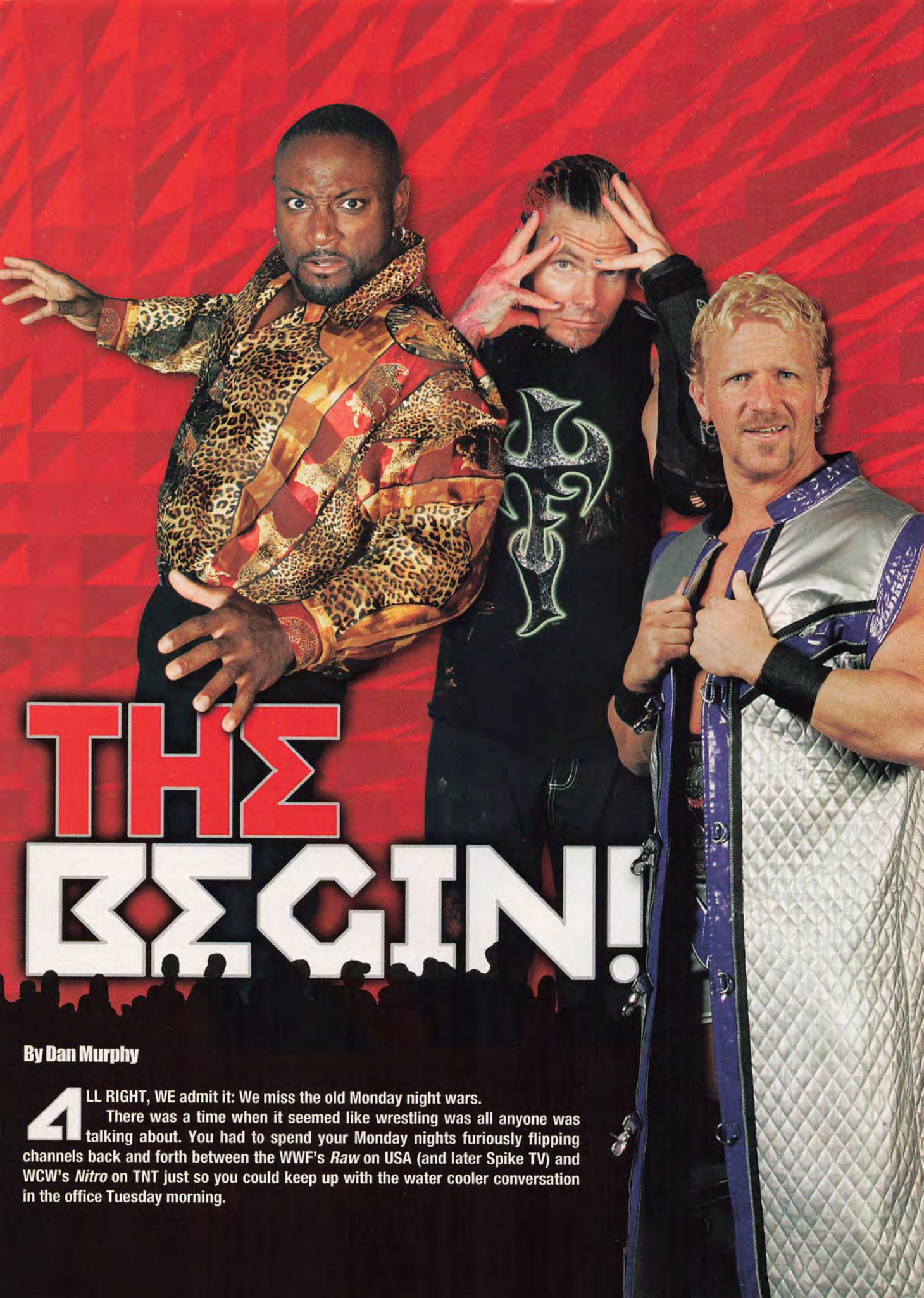


THE BEGIN!

By Dan Murphy

ALL RIGHT, WE admit it: We miss the old Monday night wars.

There was a time when it seemed like wrestling was all anyone was talking about. You had to spend your Monday nights furiously flipping channels back and forth between the WWF's *Raw* on USA (and later Spike TV) and WCW's *Nitro* on TNT just so you could keep up with the water cooler conversation in the office Tuesday morning.

There was such an atmosphere of excitement from 1995 to 2001. What injustice did Vince McMahon have lined up for Steve Austin next? Who would be the next to join the New World Order, and who would step forward to run those hooligans out of WCW? Anyone jumping from the WWF to WCW or vice versa tonight? And just what was the story with Bret Hart and what happened in Montreal?

WWE saved the return of Triple-H to WWE TV for one of the feature attractions of "Homecoming" on USA on October 3. His betrayal of Ric Flair was unexpected, however (above). Two nights earlier, TNA kicked off the first *Impact* on Spike with a sizzling A.J. Styles-Roderick Strong match (below). Fun time to be a fan.

Those were good times to be a wrestling fan. Sure, many fans—and even some of us members of the wrestling media—chose sides and favored one promotion over the other. Everyone was paying attention to the weekly Nielsen ratings to see who was winning the ratings battle each week. The WWF—today's WWE—may have helped run WCW out of business eventually, but the real winners of the Monday night wars were all of us who considered ourselves fans.

That six-year period of head-to-head competition between WCW and the WWF brought pay-per-view-caliber matches to free TV. It ushered in the WWF's "Attitude" era of racier storylines and Crash TV-style matches. It introduced a nation of fans to superstar cruiserweights from around the globe, and put Austin, The Rock, Goldberg, Dallas Page and others on mainstream talk shows and onto the big screens at your local multiplex.

Now that we're—goodness, can it really be almost five years?—removed from those glory days, we have a better appreciation for just how good us wrestling fans had it. Competition is a good thing. Without competition, things can get stale.

So forgive us if you think we're being premature as we declare WWE and TNA at war with each other. TNA obviously made a huge leap forward by securing a national TV time slot on Spike TV, a channel wrestling fans were already conditioned to tuning in to as the former home of *Monday Night Raw*. But TNA's operating budget is a tiny fraction of WWE's. A significant portion of the TNA roster is comprised of WWE castoffs, wrestlers WWE had no interest in using anymore. Heck, TNA doesn't even tour; it holds bi-weekly TV tapings at a soundstage on the Universal Studios lot in Orlando, Florida.

If this is a war, it's a Roman phalanx of infantrymen against the U.S. Army. On paper, it's a bloody massacre.

But since when are wars fought on paper? Consider this:

•During the height of the Monday night wars, the combined WCW/WWF viewing audience was about three times larger than the current WWE viewing audience. Where did all those fans go? They obviously can't be real keen on the current WWE product, or they would still be watching it, right?

•WWE live event attendance has been steadily declining for the past four years. Pay-per-view rates, with the exception of the major cards, have, for the most part, declined, too.

•TNA has been tapping into the same rabid fan base that has made Ring of Honor an underground phenomenon by signing Samoa Joe, Austin Aries, and Roderick Strong and moving A.J. Styles and Christopher Daniels into the main event position.

WWE is losing the interest of the casual fans as well as the tape-traders who eschew all things Triple-H, JBL, and Heidenreich. TNA is poised to take a bite out of WWE's audience or perhaps just bring back some of those former fans. If WWE really believed TNA wasn't a threat, why would it have gone through all of the recent legal moves to make life miserable for the folks at TNA? Where there's smoke, there's fire.

Here's our analysis of this new wrestling war and how the two sides match up. We admit, WWE has the upper hand, but we seem to remember the British army laugh-

ing at the chances of a ragtag bunch of American rabble rousers back in 1776, too. Anyone remember how that one turned out?

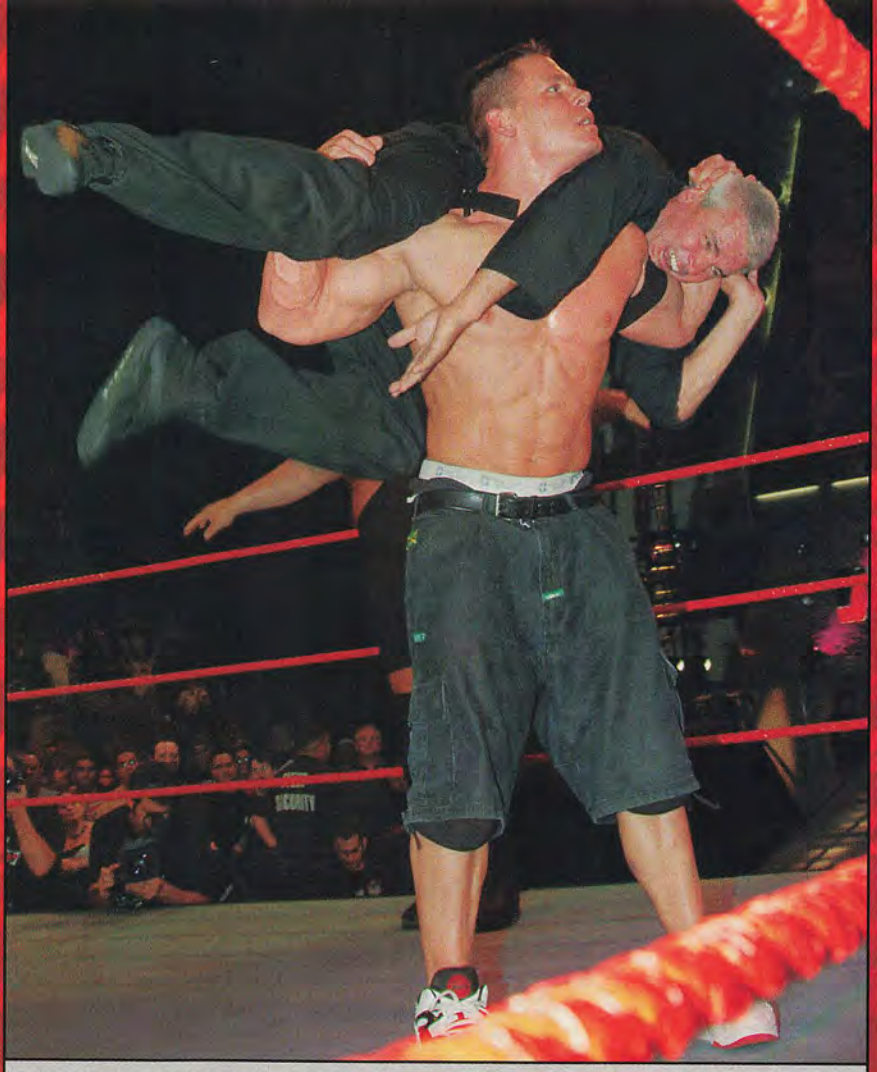
"SLAMMIN" ON SPIKE

Spike TV is the ideal cable outlet for TNA. *Impact* is packaged with the likes of *The Ultimate Fighter* and other testosterone-laden fare as part of the network's "Slammin' Saturday Night" block. Wrestling fans have been tuning in to Spike TV for the past six years, first to watch ECW and more recently to view WWE programming. We all know where Spike TV is on the cable or satellite dial. Unfortunately, TNA was stuck with a less-than-ideal late-night time slot on a night when TV viewership is at its lowest point of the week.

On the bright side, in its first week on Spike TV, *Impact* delivered a 0.78 rating (approximately 860,000 viewers), about double what WWE's *Velocity* had been scoring in the same slot on that network. A week later, that number rose to 0.82. Those who tuned in liked what they saw, and maybe a few told some friends about it.

Spike is positioning itself as a home for one of wrestling's main demographic, 16-to-30-year-old males. That is the audience TNA is looking to capture. In business terms, that's called synergy.

Spike TV gives TNA a true national presence. It is a strong fit for both entities. But there is an "X" factor to consider. Spike TV hasn't always understood what wrestling was all about. Remember back when ECW was on the station, back when it was known as The Nashville Network? TNN would cut to commercials in the middle of matches, or shrink the screen to promote the next show, and viewers would miss the end of the match? Technical problems of those sort had Paul Heyman ready to blow a gasket. He even created the character of Cyrus and his Network to spoof the incompetence he felt he was dealing with from the network.



A strange but tantalizing John Cena-Eric Bischoff match put a cap on that first stacked *Raw* back on USA. Don't think for a second that WWE isn't concerned about TNA.

It's hardly accurate to say Team 3D jumped from WWE to TNA, but it's about as close as we've gotten to a jump between major companies since WCW crumbled.

WWE seemed to have things much easier since Spike management decided to adopt a more hands-off approach and not tinker with WWE's winning formula. But TNA on Spike at 11 p.m. on Saturday nights is not going to draw anywhere near the ratings that WWE drew on Spike during prime time on Mondays. Everyone knows that. What would happen if TNA's ratings ever started to come in much lower than those for *The Ultimate Fighter* or other "Slammin' Saturday Night" programming? Would Spike start cutting into *Impact* to promote its other shows, just as it cut into ECW to promote *Rollerjam* and rodeo events? If so, the relationship between TNA could Spike could fall apart quickly.

WELCOME HOME

Raw's return to the USA Network has been a bizarre occurrence. Back in 2001, when WWE left USA for Spike TV (then known as The National Network), then-USA CEO Barry

Randy Orton might be expected to step up his game a little more quickly now that TNA has found a strong cable home. TNA has no shortage of promising young stars itself.

Diller called wrestling fans "pimply-faced, mean-spirited young males." He claimed wrestling fans tuned into the network just to watch wrestling and then turned the channel, turning to "God knows what antisocial pursuits."

Not exactly the sort of comments that would endear someone to the wrestling public. It was a virtual heel turn, for Pete's sake!

Now, just four years later, WWE is back on the USA Network and we're supposed to believe everything is just hunky-dory? Believe it or not, we are, and it seems to be. The USA Network has been tirelessly promoting WWE's return to the station, going so far as to run commercials on NBC and on other affiliated stations. Clearly, the USA Network is more expansive than Spike TV, and the cross-promotional opportunities are limitless. John Cena on *The Tonight Show With Jay Leno?* No problem. JBL on *Conan O'Brien?* Consider it done. WWE is already the established brand, the household name, a synonym for pro wrestling in the U.S. The return to USA reaffirms its position as the premier name in the sports entertainment field.

From a head-to-head standpoint, WWE's move was the perfect counter to TNA's move to Spike TV. TNA hyped its October 1 *Impact* debut as hard as it could, but how much could it do in a one-hour debut show at 11 p.m. on a Saturday to compete with *Raw's* three-hour prime time "Homecoming" on October 3? We saw the debut of the former Dudley Boyz, the return of Kevin Nash, Rhino vs. Jeff Hardy, and a thrilling A.J. Styles vs. Roderick Strong match to kick off *Impact's* run on Spike. Most of our staff liked the show, and fan feedback we read and heard was mostly positive. It was supposed to be an epochal week for TNA, but there was nothing it or Spike could do to stop people from talking about WWE's night of legends. Three hours, a cavalcade of huge stars, two great matches, and a 4.4 rating.

WWE vs. WCW Revisited?

It took WCW until 1995 to begin to mount a serious challenge to the WWF, and by that time, WCW had the virtually limitless finances of Ted Turner behind it. Despite WCW's claims of being "where the big boys play," the company could never truly mount a challenge to the WWF until WCW Executive Vice President Eric Bischoff was able to sign Hulk Hogan, Randy Savage, Scott Hall, and Kevin Nash away from Vince McMahon. Soon thereafter, when Turner gave Bischoff the green light to put a Monday night show on TNT to compete with *Raw,* things got very interesting.

TNA doesn't have that sort of money to throw around. It can't dole out big money contracts with six-figure downside guarantees. So TNA has to take a different tack in order to compete. Its best bet is to take a good look at what the WWF did to surpass WCW. TNA needs to use old stars to create new stars. It needs to develop edgy, original storylines.

TNA cannot allow itself to get caught up in the creative control game in which certain stars get veto power over their storylines and matches, a problem that took a devastating toll on WCW. TNA management needs to remember that no one star is bigger than the company. A rising tide lifts all boats. TNA management should be required to do two things: Read R.D. Reynolds and Bryan Alvarez' masterful book *The Death Of WCW* and watch *The Rise And Fall Of ECW* DVD. And don't step on the same landmines Bischoff and Paul Heyman did. It needs to use shrewd marketing and smart matchmaking to survive and ultimately thrive.

One thing is for sure: McMahon and the WWE front office remember what worked and what didn't work the first time

It would have been cool if Lita tying up Matt Hardy and causing him to drop a loser-leaves-Raw match to Edge at "Homecoming" (above) meant Matt would be off to join brother Jeff (knocking down Rhino, below) in TNA. In time, maybe some WWE stars will *choose* to leave for TNA.

around. Don't expect them to make many tactical errors.

If TNA does a lot of things right and generates what are considered good ratings for that time slot on Spike—that small increase from week one to week two was a good sign—it's not out of the realm of possibility that Spike will give the promotion a Monday night time slot. Then it'd really be on!

THE ROSTERS COMPARED

WWE's talent roster is much deeper than TNA's, especially when you consider all the talent in Ohio Valley Wrestling and Deep South as well. It all goes back to WWE having a lot more money to spend. For the sake of brevity, we'll focus on how the champions and select top contenders match up.

Heavyweight champions: Jeff Jarrett vs. John Cena and Batista. Jarrett doesn't match up well against either WWE champ. He's not as dynamic or as powerful as Batista or as charismatic as Cena. Of course, he is a heel and an entirely different style of wrestler. He could certainly outwrestle either WWE titleholder, but it would be hard to imagine him pinning either of them. ADVANTAGE: WWE

Raven vs. Kurt Angle. It would be an intriguing matchup, but Angle is really in a class of his own. There's no one on the TNA roster who can match him. ADVANTAGE: WWE

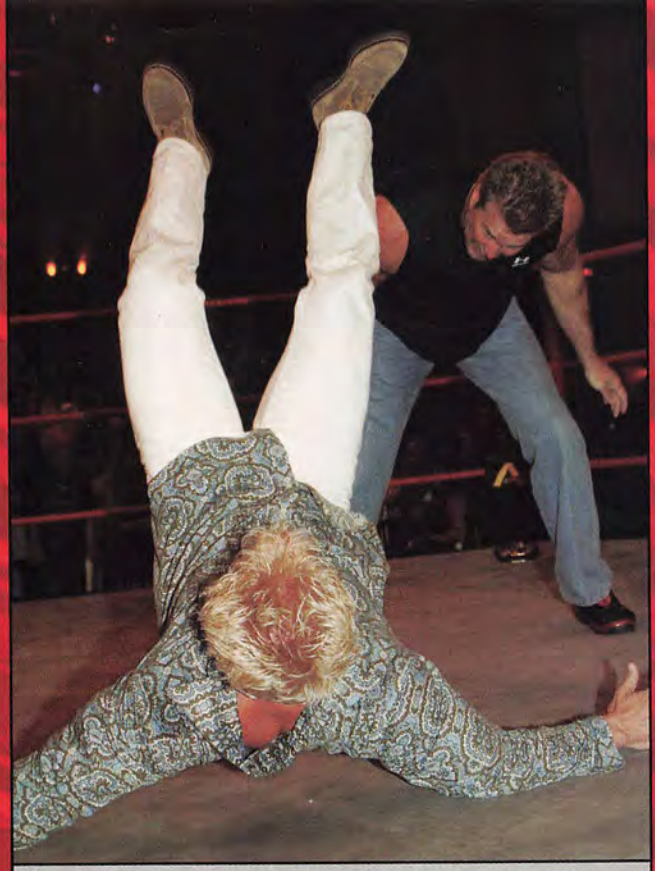
Rhino vs. JBL. Layfield claims he is a "wrestling god," but he doesn't have the intensity or drive of a raging manbeast. Score one for the underdogs. ADVANTAGE: TNA

Jeff Hardy vs. Triple-H. Once upon a time, Hardy scored an upset over HHH to win the Intercontinental title. It was a once-in-a-lifetime win. ADVANTAGE: WWE

Abyss vs. Eddie Guerrero. Guerrero has the advantage in scientific skill and experience, but he's been on a major losing skid in big money matches of late. Abyss is hungrier, but we just have to give the slight edge to "Latino Heat" here. ADVANTAGE: WWE

Secondary champions: A.J. Styles vs. Ric Flair and Chris Benoit. A win over someone like Flair (is there anyone quite like Flair, though?) is exactly the sort of thing that Styles needs to develop into a credible heavyweight title force. At this stage of his career, he would have to be considered a favorite against the "Nature Boy." Not so with Benoit. "The Crippler" would likely represent the biggest challenge of Styles' career. It would be a Match of the Year candidate in the making for sure, but Benoit holds the advantage. ADVANTAGE: draw

Christopher Daniels vs. Carlito. This one wouldn't even



It was scary to see TNA set up Kevin Nash vs. Jeff Jarrett as the first NWA title feud of the Spike era. Don't worry, we don't *think* TNA will be building around such veterans forever.

be close. Maybe in a few years, but not now. Carlito might match Daniels in the charisma department, but that doesn't count for too much here. ADVANTAGE: TNA

Samoa Joe vs. Shelton Benjamin. This might be another Match of the Year contender. Joe's strong-style brawling tactics against Benjamin's suplex-based scientific attack. It could go either way. We'll give this one to Benjamin in a toss-up. ADVANTAGE: WWE

Tag team champions: The Naturals vs. The New Legion of Doom and Lance Cade and Trevor Murdoch. Andy Douglas and Chase Stevens have shown a lot of potential—particularly after the time they spent with Chris Candido as their adviser—but they're hardly a great tag team in the traditional sense. Still, they're better than WWE's two champions. ADVANTAGE: TNA

Team 3D vs. M-N-M. The one time these two teams clashed (in OVW), M-N-M came out on top, thanks to a pair of brass knuckles and a lot of referee distraction from Melina. We're sure that loss still eats away at the former Dudleys. If they were to meet again, we would expect to see Brother Ray and Devon put Mercury, Nitro, *and* Melina through tables. ADVANTAGE: TNA

America's Most Wanted vs. The Hurricane and Rosey. Let's face it, Hurricane and Rosey are a comedy act that have probably overstayed their welcome as a team. AMW, on the other hand, are one of the finest teams in the sport today. ADVANTAGE: TNA

Final tally: TNA 5, WWE 5. And when you consider TNA is competing against two different brands in these categories, that's pretty darned impressive.

DOES WWE REALLY CARE?

You would be hard-pressed to find anyone in an official capacity within WWE acknowledging TNA as dangerous competition, but the WWE front office is keeping a very close eye on the company. The fact that WWE has sent its legal team after TNA shows that WWE management realizes the company has the potential to cut into its bottom line. Why else would WWE file injunctions to prevent The Dudley

Alex Shelley, Chris Sabin, and Petey Williams are three very important parts of TNA's X division and thus three big parts of what sets TNA apart from WWE. That X division need not be totally separate from the heavyweight division.

Old reliables Booker T and Christian (above) ... underutilized newcomers like Super Crazy (left) ... WWE has what seems like a limitless mid-card. But TNA has good depth, too. And its roster compares surprisingly favorably to WWE's.

Boyz from wrestling under the ring names they used for years, and even force Team 3D to alter its look?

In fact, WWE management reportedly sent TNA a cease-and-desist letter asking TNA to stop referring to its talent as "wrestling superstars," claiming that term is WWE's intellectual property. Whether or not that specific point stands up to legal review—or if TNA has any intention of fighting the point—the message is clear: WWE wants to position its talent as major league superstars, and paint everyone else as minor league talent.

WWE might not consider TNA to be competition, but it certainly sees TNA as potential competition. And it's preparing to fight if necessary.

TNA—FIVE "DO'S" AND FIVE "DON'TS"

Do: Keep signing some recently released WWE talent. Some WWE castoffs, like The Dudley Boyz and Rhino, have built-in fan followings that will follow them to TNA. Others, like Charlie Haas and Mordecai, have loads of talent, but were misused by WWE. There's room for a lot of them in TNA.

Don't: Push former WWE stars harder than homegrown talent simply because they are former WWE stars. TNA has to resist the temptation of sticking new acquisitions into prime positions just to leverage their name recognition for short-term success. TNA has to assimilate new faces into the mix and use them to help build stars in TNA, not instantly push them over established TNA names. Otherwise, fans will see homegrown TNA talents as inferior to ex-WWE stars (who could already be seen as inferior to current WWE stars) and TNA will be unable to create new stars. That happened in WCW.

Do: Showcase the X division. The X division is what most differentiates TNA from WWE. While WWE has adopted a more conservative ring style in recent years and barely pushes its cruiserweight division, TNA's X competitors are tearing it up. That's a huge competitive advantage for TNA. Make the X title seem as prestigious as the NWA title.

Don't: Revolve around Planet Jarrett. To its credit, TNA management is loyal to Jarrett, who is really the pioneer of TNA. Jarrett is a skilled competitor, but TNA cannot allow him to monopolize the heavyweight title when other potential titleholders could draw more fan interest. Business has to come before personal friendships.

Do: Keep shopping for talent in Ring of Honor. ROH is an excellent breeding ground for rising stars. TNA is wisely watching wrestlers develop a unique style in ROH and then bringing them to TNA, while WWE is relying almost exclusively on its developmental system to create new stars. WWE's system results in a lot of musclebound guys who look alike and wrestle the same style, whereas TNA's system brings fresh faces and styles into the mix. Another huge competitive advantage.

Don't: Book so many multiple-man matches for the heavyweight title. Those gimmicky four-, five-, and six-way matches may have some exciting moments, but they lack

It looks like TNA is setting up Monty Brown for the huge push we all thought he should have gotten a year ago. If he makes use of all the potential we think he has, TNA could have a terrific new cornerstone.

the drama of a two-man rivalry for the company's heavyweight championship. Wrestling is best when it's man against man (or tag team against tag team). These crazy "King Of The Mountain" matches damage the prestige of the championship. It's just lazy matchmaking.

Do: Mix X division guys in with non-X division guys. TNA can't allow its X division to be its own separate entity, serving as a sort of glass ceiling. Just because Daniels, Styles, Samoa Joe, Chris Sabin, and Alex Shelley are fantastic X division talents doesn't mean they shouldn't get shots at the heavyweight title or face guys like Rhino, Jarrett, and Team 3D.

Don't: Play the diva game. WWE seems hell-bent on inserting beautiful women into storylines for no reason at times. If TNA follows suit, it will come off as derivative. If it puts pretty ladies on TV, it should make sure they can actually wrestle. Leave the eye candy to the other guys. Zig when they zag.

Do: Tour select cities. Touring can be a huge expense for a young company, but the potential advantages outweigh the risks. By hitting select other markets, TNA can continue to build its fan base at the grassroots level. Nothing wins over fans like the opportunity to see their favorite stars in person.

Don't: Spend money foolishly on non-wrestlers. Pull the names of Toby Keith, Hermie Sadler, Dennis Rodman, Jonny Fairplay, and the other so-called stars out of the Rolodex. Win over new wrestling fans through good, old-fashioned *wrestling* and not costly, meaningless cameos.

WWE VS. TNA: WHAT WE'RE SAYING

"It's easy for me to support TNA as it goes up against WWE because it would be good for the wrestling business as a whole, and our magazines are a part of that business. But TNA really needs to establish itself as its own unique entity and not just present itself as a non-WWE wrestling product or WWE lite. Millions of fans still watch WWE, go to the events, and buy their merchandise. TNA has to be much more concerned with improving its own product than worry about toppling Vince McMahon's empire." —Stu Saks (Publisher)

"Not to knock TNA, but I don't think we'll ever see anything like the old Monday night wars again in our lifetime. The WWF-WCW war completely changed our industry. That competition between those two companies ushered in the era of the Internet, where plugged-in fans have a good idea of what to expect well before things unfold on TV. We've lost some of our innocence as fans, and we can never get that back. TNA could build a strong audience and become a viable, self-sustaining company, which would be fantastic. But I don't think it can ever become another WCW. I can't see it really competing with WWE for a while yet." —Dave Lenker (Editor-in-Chief)

"I really don't know how anyone can predict TNA's future at this point. What I can tell everyone is that I think Christopher Daniels, Chris Sabin, and Samoa Joe are light years ahead of a high percentage of the WWE roster. Yet the fans cheer louder for the John Cenas and Batistas and has-beens like Hulk Hogan and Kevin Nash. Who can predict what fans like that will watch? I suppose the fact that we're analyzing this as even a potential promotional war says something at least." —Brandi Mankiewicz (Managing Editor)

"I really like TNA's chances. WWE has been losing viewership for the past few years. If TNA can find those fans who somehow became disenchanted with wrestling and rekindle their passion for the sport, or appeal to a new generation of potential fans, the possibilities are exciting. They've brought in some fantastic young talent and some bright minds handling the matchmaking duties. Put it this way. If they were selling TNA stock, I'd think about investing in it." —Will Welsh (Senior Writer) □

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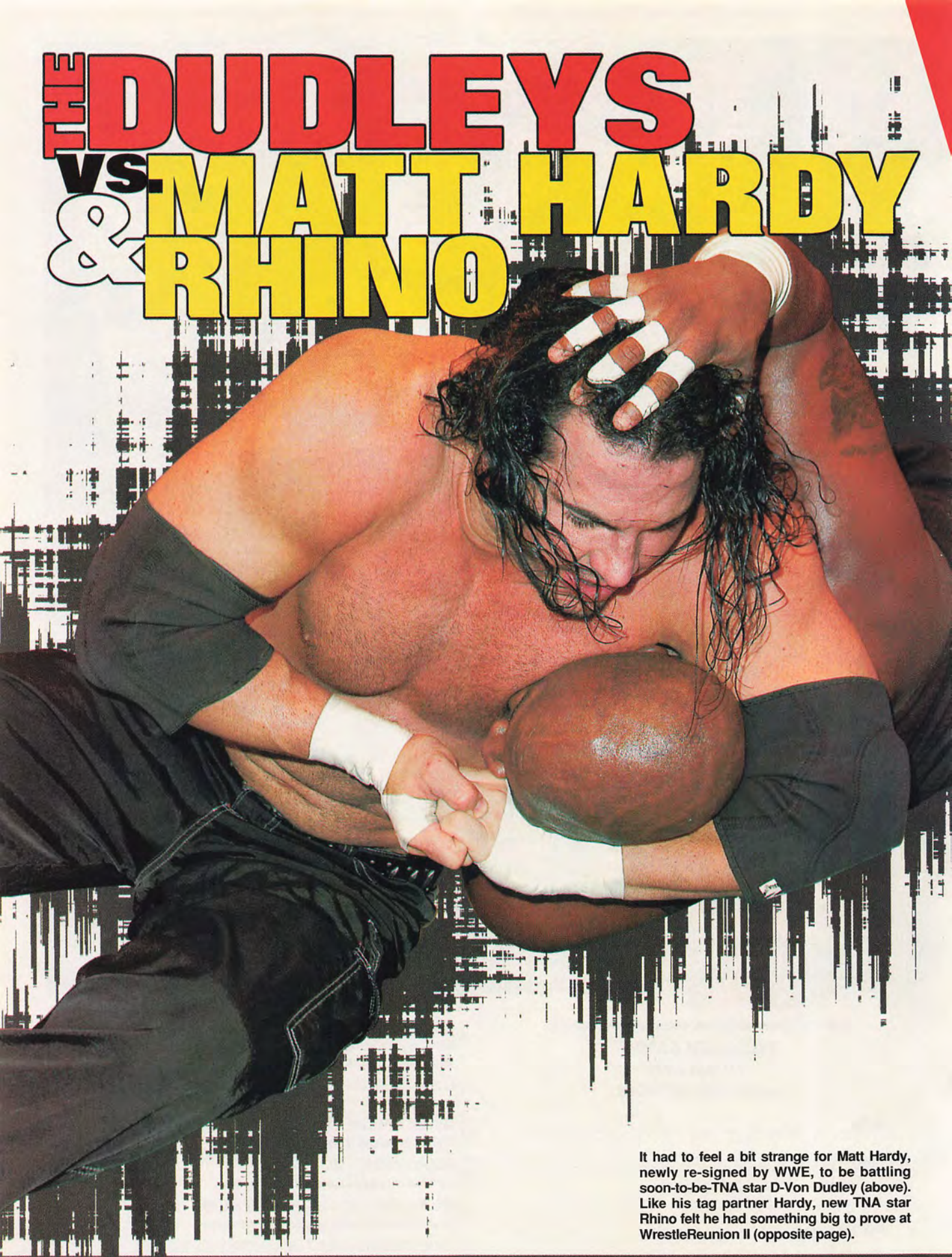
THE DUDLEYS VS. MATT HARDY & RHINO



It had to feel a bit strange for Matt Hardy, newly re-signed by WWE, to be battling soon-to-be-TNA star D-Von Dudley (above). Like his tag partner Hardy, new TNA star Rhino felt he had something big to prove at WrestleReunion II (opposite page).

"This Could Have Gotten Ugly"

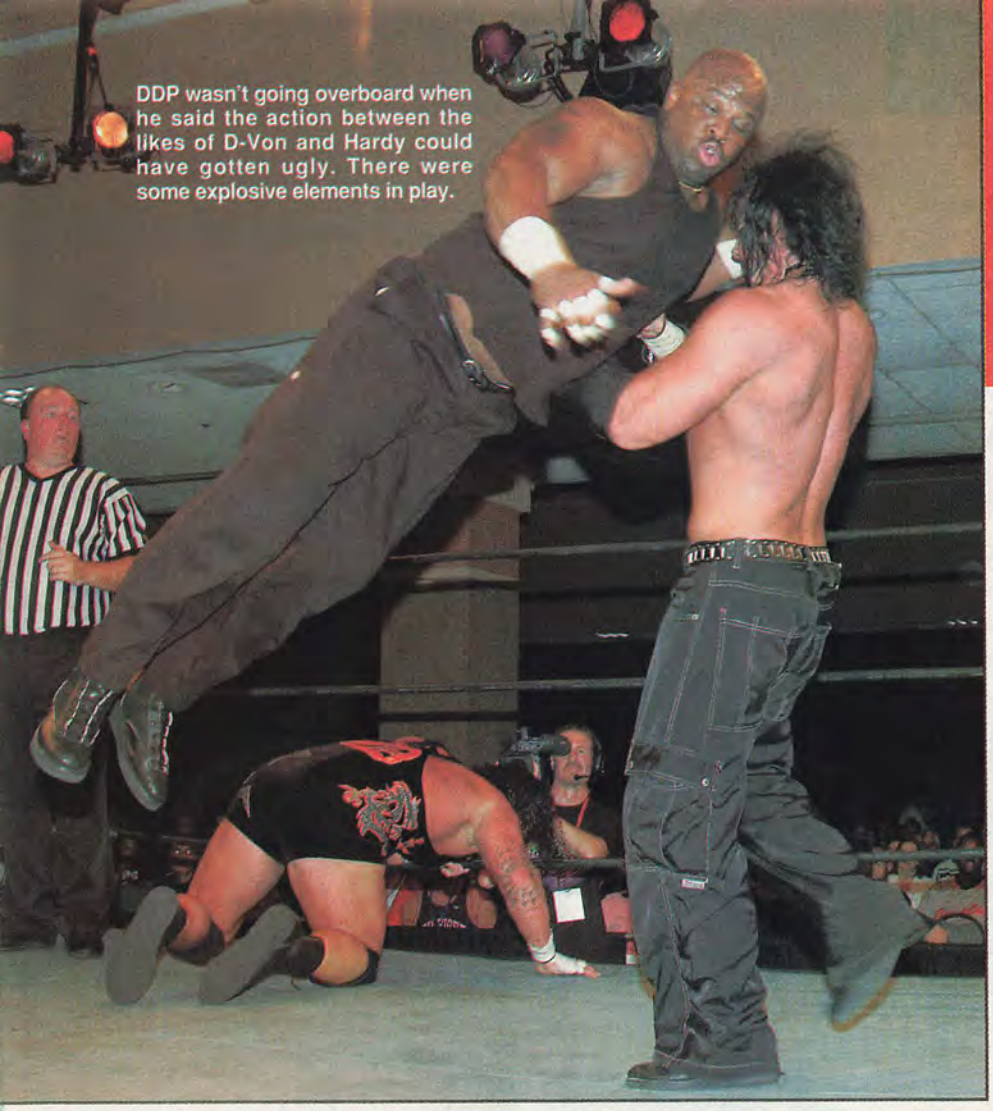
By Jason Langin

"DIAMOND" DALLAS PAGE took a sip of bottled water as the Wrestle-Reunion II wrestling card began to draw to a close. As one of the co-hosts of the amazing event held in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania, in August, Page had been through one very long day. Make that *two* long days by that point.

But this had been an incredibly successful day as a whole. There had been a tremendous turnout for the autograph sessions that morning and afternoon, hundreds of fans had purchased tickets to attend the wrestling event, and numerous vendors were on hand to sell their wares to the attendees. The day sure looked like a success from a business standpoint.

And Page was also successful from a competitor's standpoint. He had technically lost a match to Larry Zbyszko *(see www.pwi-online.com for the complete story),* but had defended the honor of Bruno Sam-

Photos By George Napolitano



DDP wasn't going overboard when he said the action between the likes of D-Von and Hardy could have gotten ugly. There were some explosive elements in play.

martino in the process. Page looked great in his match and showed no signs of ring rust.

However, the look on DDP's face was not one of relief. Instead, it was one of concern. Dusty Rhodes, who had been successful earlier in the card (in a wild eight-man tag match), put a hand on Page's shoulder to try to find out what his buddy's problem was.

"Did you take a look at the match list, 'Dream'?" Page said. "See for yourself. You'll figure out what my problem is. This could be like a little bit of WWF vs. WCW all over again."

As Rhodes turned to the locker room wall, he read the list of competitors for the next bout and understood Page's fear immediately.

The main event of the evening was a tag team encounter pitting The Dudley Boyz (who for legal reasons needed to appear officially as "Team 3D") against Rhino and Matt Hardy (with valet Talia). Based on the history the Dudleys, Hardy, and Rhino shared, there was certainly reason to think that the match would be explosive. But recent events had upped the ante, and the potential for true disaster was now extremely high.

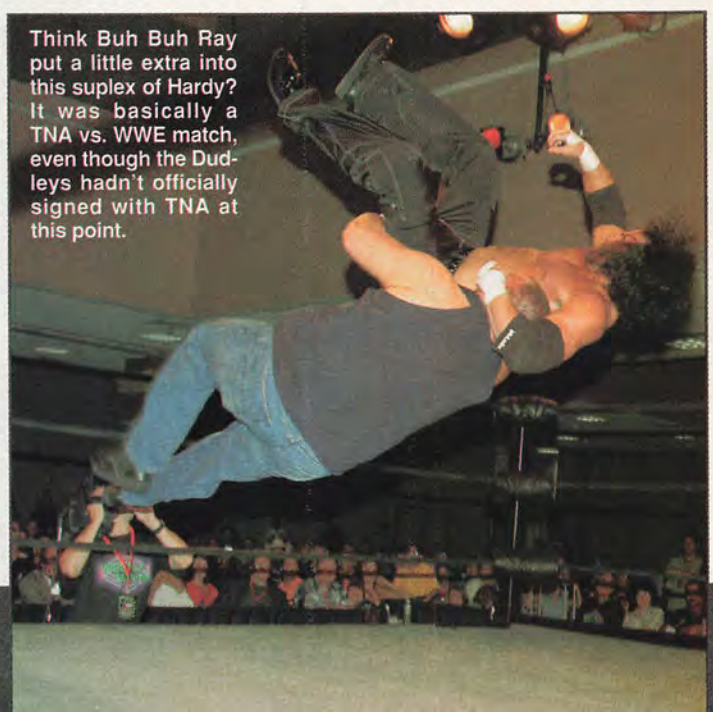
Take the Dudleys first. Mere weeks before, Buh Buh Ray and D-Von were told that negotiations on a

"Based on the history the Dudleys, Hardy, and Rhino shared, there was certainly reason to think that the match would be explosive. But recent events had upped the ante, and the potential for true disaster was now extremely high."

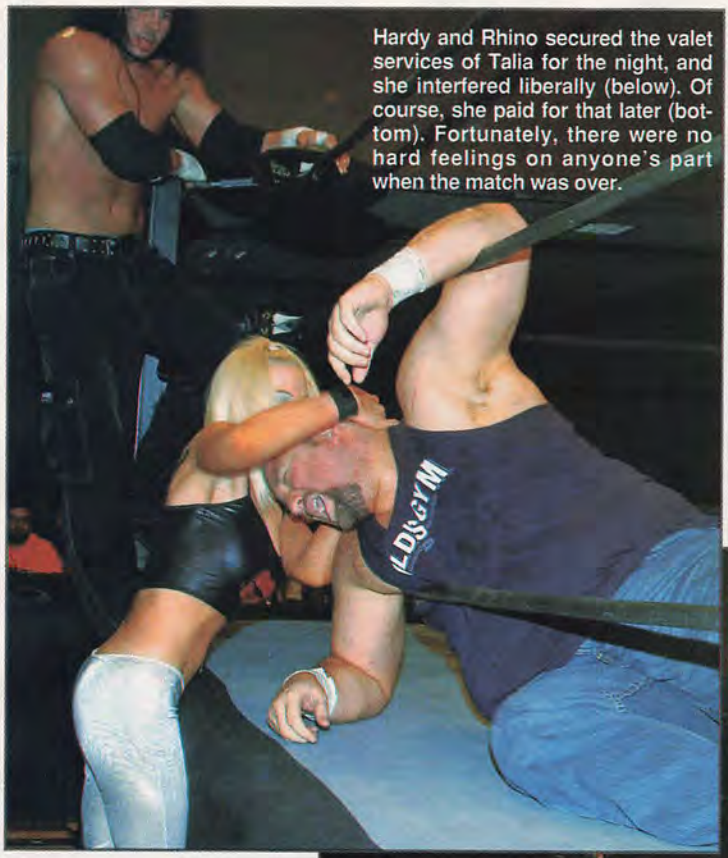
contract extension with WWE, to which the Dudleys had given six solid years of service, had been cut off. The Dudleys were clearly not pleased with the situation, feeling as if they had been given a raw deal by their former employer. And while the Dudleys would have probably preferred to have had Vince McMahon and other WWE executives standing across the ring from them, they had to settle for Hardy and Rhino.

Similarly to the Dudleys, Rhino had been released from his WWE contract earlier in the year. Plus, all three men had recently competed in the One Night Stand pay-per-view to rave reviews. But unlike the Dudleys, Rhino already had his ticket punched. He had landed a spot on the TNA roster. Still, Rhino had something to prove.

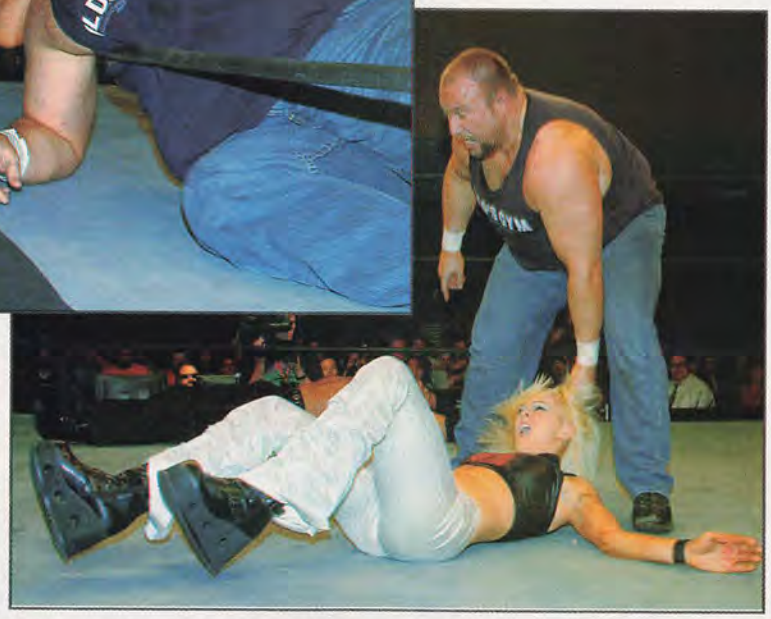
And then there was Matt Hardy, a man struggling with personal problems, having just made his triumphant (?) return to the company that had recently fired him for making public those very same problems. A man that had been through countless wars with the Dudleys alongside brother Jeff. But this was not the Hardy fans were used to



Think Buh Buh Ray put a little extra into this suplex of Hardy? It was basically a TNA vs. WWE match, even though the Dudleys hadn't officially signed with TNA at this point.



Hardy and Rhino secured the valet services of Talia for the night, and she interfered liberally (below). Of course, she paid for that later (bottom). Fortunately, there were no hard feelings on anyone's part when the match was over.



seeing, the Matt Hardy that liked sushi and extolled the virtues of Mattitude. This was a bulked up, angry, vengeful Matt Hardy. A fourth competitor with something to prove.

Just to recap: You had two about-to-be-TNA wrestlers feeling bitter toward anything and everything WWE on one side and one TNA wrestler who had been dumped by WWE and one wrestler who had been heavily courted by, but then rejected TNA at the last minute to rejoin WWE on the other.

The Dudleys had old issues with Hardy and Rhino, who was an ally of Edge and Christian while they feuded with Buh Buh Ray and D-Von. And the Dudleys probably didn't appreciate Hardy's decision not to sign with TNA. Heck, for that very same reason, could Hardy trust Rhino?

Yes, Page had reason to be worried. Someone was going to get hurt.

Back in the arena, fans were just starting to settle down after a frenzied six-man tag match pitting the Funks and Mick Foley against Jim Cornette's Midnight Express. It had been an exciting contest, perhaps the best to that point. Throughout the night, fans were given a chance to see some of their heroes from the past compete—from Masked Superstar to Don Muraco. But they knew that the main event promised something special. The four men about to compete were not old-timers stepping out for one last great match. These were men still in the prime of their careers. Everyone knew that this one could possibly tear the house down.

Good thing the Valley Forge Convention Center had a strong foundation.

The four men tried to destroy one another from the start of the match to the very end. Everyone looked to be in tremendous physical condition, and each man gave everything he had. It didn't take long for the contest to turn into an all-out brawl that started to get very personal. Buh Buh Ray spewed out insults to his opponents such as, "You sucked in ECW!" (to Rhino) and, "Your brother was better than you!" (to Hardy). Neither comment was appreciated, and Buh Buh was promptly given his receipt.

As the match drew to a close, referee John Finnegan was caught in a collision that briefly rendered him unconscious. Time for a table to come into play. Rhino charged at his opponents, hoping to obliterate someone with his dreaded gore. But the alert Dudleys evaded the attack, and Rhino put an unsuspecting Hardy through the table that was propped up against the turnbuckles. Rhino was then tossed unceremoniously from the ring, allowing the Dudleys to plaster Hardy with a modified 3D for the pin.

And that was where the violence ended. Shockingly, the wrestlers stood in the ring together and raised one another's hands in victory. Each wrestler, including the normally quiet Rhino, voiced his opinions about his current state of affairs on the microphone. The Dudleys went so far as to say that if they could only wrestle one team for the rest of their lives, it would be The Hardy Boyz. The fans gave this ultimate sign of respect a lengthy standing ovation.

In the backstage area, DDP finally breathed a sigh of relief. "This could have gotten ugly," he said to no one in particular.

But it didn't, because the four wrestlers had accomplished their goals. They all let fans know that they were still big time in-ring players, a fact that was undeniable by match's end. It turned out DDP didn't have that much to fear. It was nothing personal. Just business. □

ORTONARY

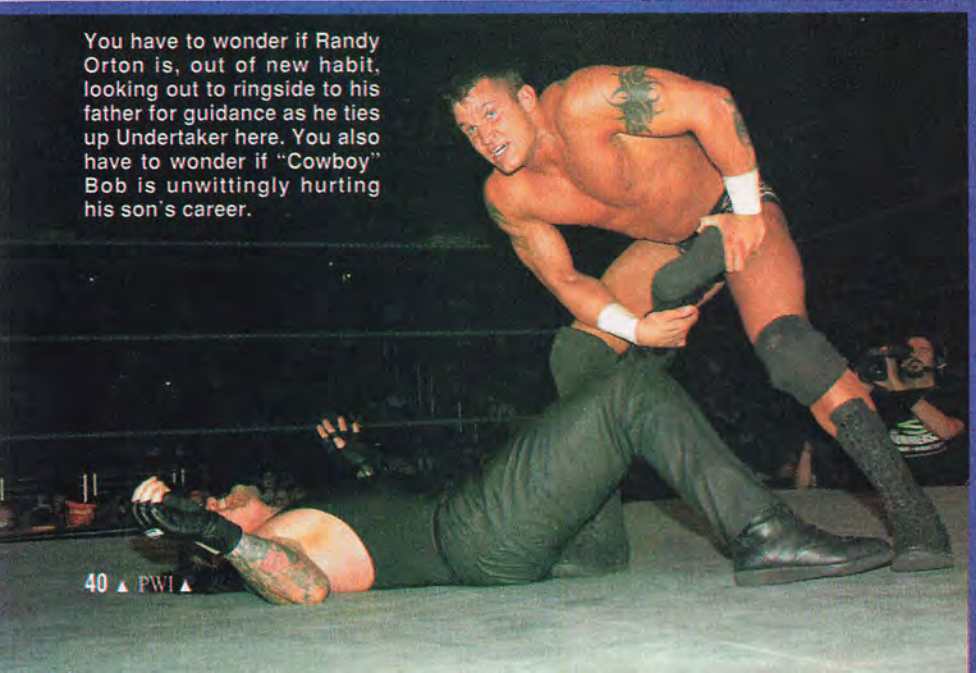
Why This Father-Son Combination

By Frank Krewda

IN THE MOVIE *The Godfather,* new don Michael Corleone removes his stepbrother Tom Hagen as *consigliore,* or adviser, to the crime family. To assuage the concern of the veteran gangsters who'd grown to trust Hagen over the years, Corleone says of his father and former don, Vito, "If I need advice, who's more qualified to give it than my father?"

Drawing on the experience of one's father for guidance may work in Hollywood—and even in organized crime—but it rarely works in pro sports, and even less in professional wrestling. Even a WWE Hall of Famer such as Bob Orton Jr. and his ultra-talented offspring Randy aren't likely to be able to overcome the strange dynamic of a father-son tandem. And that's why this combination just won't work.

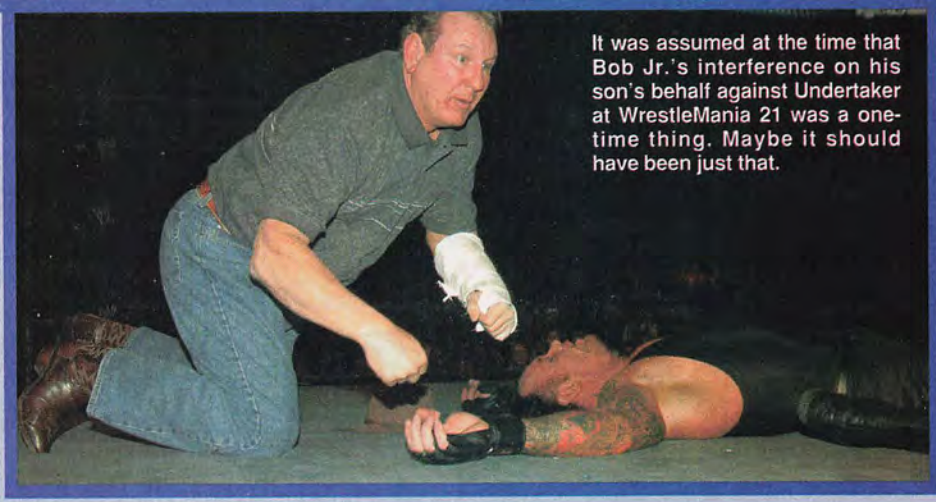
Sure, there have been many fathers and sons who have wrestled in overlapping eras: Blackjack Mulligan and Barry Windham and Ric and David Flair are two examples. We need only to look to the Gagnes (Verne and Greg) and the Armstrongs ("Bullet" Bob and any one of his sons) to find a few that have tasted what could be called success while working as a team.



You have to wonder if Randy Orton is, out of new habit, looking out to ringside to his father for guidance as he ties up Undertaker here. You also have to wonder if "Cowboy" Bob is unwittingly hurting his son's career.

TIMES

Is Destined To Fail!



It was assumed at the time that Bob Jr.'s interference on his son's behalf against Undertaker at WrestleMania 21 was a one-time thing. Maybe it should have been just that.

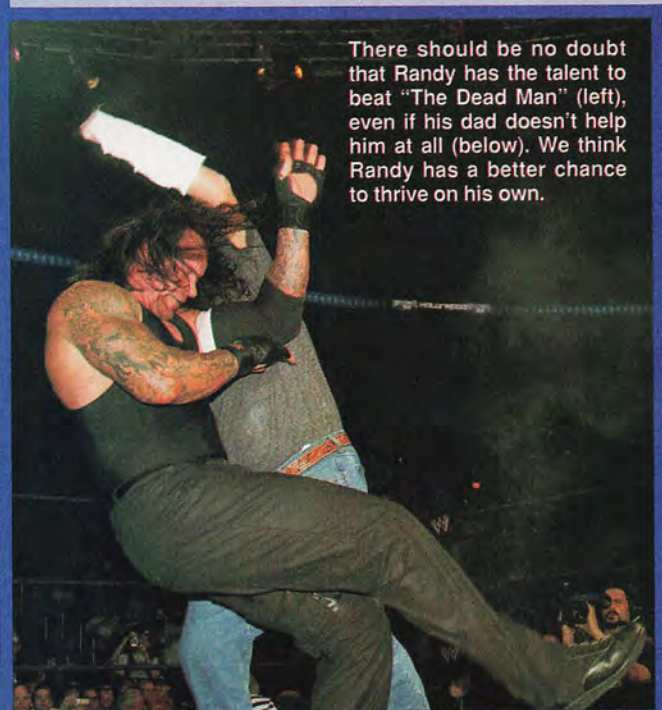
All too often, father-and-son combos that devote their energy to a common goal fail. That's because they find out they share very little save for that goal—and the differences in perspective, ability, experience, and principles are irreconcilable.

Few father-and-son teams could have starker differences than "Cowboy" Bob Jr. and Randy Orton. No need to look beyond the obvious here. Randy has already held the World title. He is, in fact, the youngest man in WWE history to hold a title of that distinction. Bob Jr. spent many years chasing the WWF belt in vain, depending on the services of The Grand Wizard as well as a wrist injury that required him to (suspiciously) wear a cast for years on end. Randy is in the prime of his physical conditioning (not withstanding previous injuries). Bob Jr., as evidenced by his interference and futile efforts in the ring against The Undertaker, is at least a pound too heavy and a step too slow.

But there are more meaningful differences. Randy was heavily promoted as a blue-chip prospect from the start of his WWE career and has been given every opportunity to succeed. His father was a career mid-carder—albeit a very talented one—who stayed in the WWF top tier mostly due to his ties to Roddy Piper. Yes, Bob Jr. was as tough as anyone, and his rough-and-ready cowboy gimmick had a certain degree of charm. But within the first six months of his career, Randy connected with fans of his era in ways Bob Jr. could have only dreamed of connecting. His natural surliness made him so easy to hate. Plus, thanks to his time in Evolution, Randy has already experienced the high life.

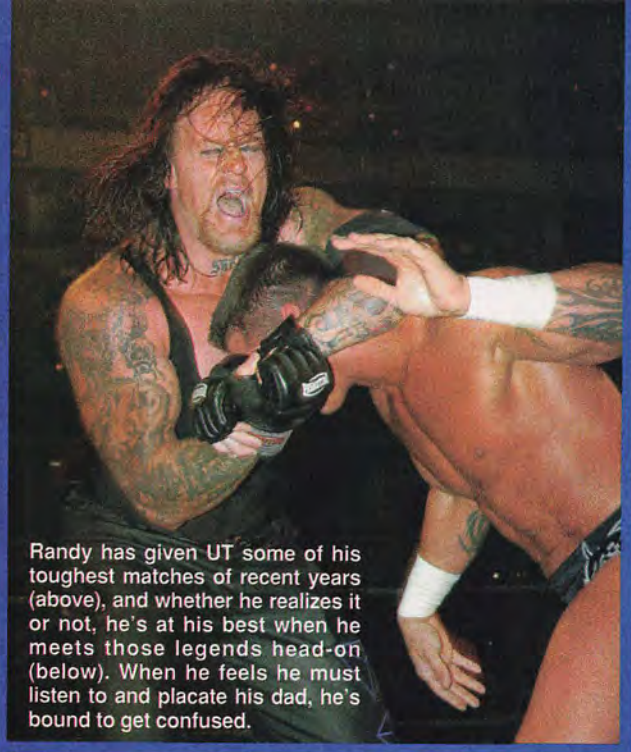
Bob Jr., by his own admission, spent his career on the road limping from town to town and back home again. What can he teach Randy about the business that he hasn't already seen? Not a whole lot.

Aside from cramping each other's styles, the Ortons must also overcome the father-son relationship that so often smothers, rather than springboards, careers. Bob Jr., as the father, might discourage his son from taking unnecessary gambles in the ring—one of the key ingredients in the trajectory of any young wrestler's career.

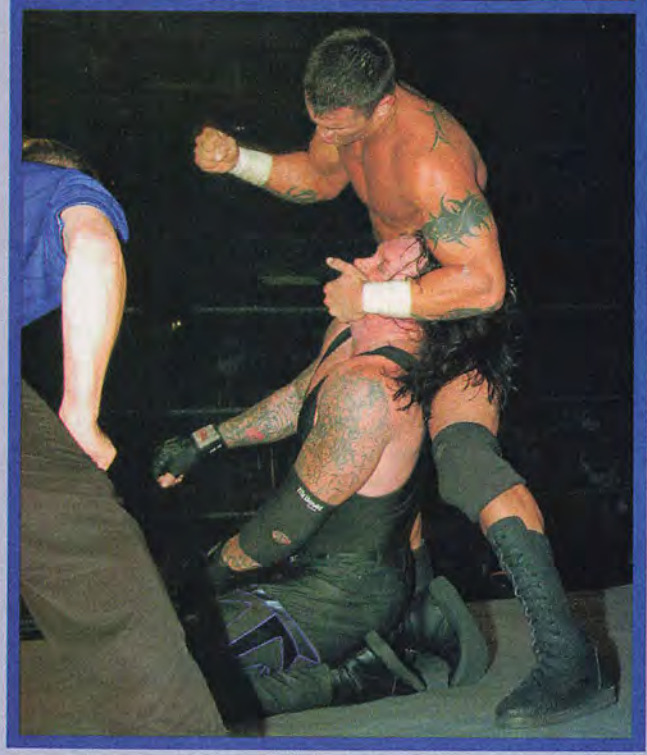


There should be no doubt that Randy has the talent to beat "The Dead Man" (left), even if his dad doesn't help him at all (below). We think Randy has a better chance to thrive on his own.

"Sad but true, parents often undercut their children's quest for greatness by insisting, sometimes to the grave, that they–the parents–know what's best for the child better than the child knows. The result is typically resentment. But Randy will never tell his father to back off, butt out, or keep his opinions to himself. What good son does that?"



Randy has given UT some of his toughest matches of recent years (above), and whether he realizes it or not, he's at his best when he meets those legends head-on (below). When he feels he must listen to and placate his dad, he's bound to get confused.



Randy Orton is a dynamic individual who excels in a proactive rather than reactive role. Regardless of Bob Jr.'s intentions—and we have no reason to believe they aren't good—the love of his son will no doubt cloud his judgment as a guiding force in Randy's career.

This phenomenon can also work in reverse. Some fathers try to live vicariously through their sons, trying to achieve what they couldn't during their own time. Worse, some parents expect their children to achieve greatness using their own methodology.

A prime example is the Marvis-Joe Frazier saga of pro boxing. Every time Marvis took his lumps in the ring, his father/trainer, Joe, had a litany of excuses prepared for his son's postfight interview.

Of course, "Smokin'" Joe, a former Olympic medalist and heavyweight champion, wanted nothing more than for Marvis to duplicate his glory in the ring. However, it soon became apparent to everyone but Joe that Marvis didn't have his father's talents. Joe's persisted in having Marvis fight Joe's way, and he earned his son some wicked beatings in the ring. Eventually, Marvis came to understand his own limitations—as well as his father's—and returned to his career as a preacher.

Sad but true, parents often undercut their children's quest for greatness by insisting, sometimes to the grave, that they—the parents—know what's best for the child better than the child knows. The result is typically resentment.

But Randy will never tell his father to back off, butt out, or keep his opinions to himself. What good son does that? Not Randy. If we've observed anything about Randy Orton, it's that he has the utmost respect for his father. (Remember how he lambasted Roddy Piper at "WWE Homecoming" for not giving his father enough credit for boosting his career and not appreciating him the way he should have?) But how much of a strain would that put on the young superstar who no doubt will be gunning for current World champ Batista and another title reign once his feud with The Undertaker has finally played itself out?

Will Bob Orton Jr.'s involvement in his son's career have any value at all to Randy? In the short-term, it can't hurt having an experienced, trustworthy hand watching his back as he does battle with Undertaker, perhaps the most accomplished and dangerous legend on his hit list. It was Bob Jr.'s interference that allowed Randy to pin "The Dead Man" at SummerSlam.

But the long-term prospects for Randy with his father by his side are much less rosy. The more influence Bob exerts over Randy's career, the less Randy can feel comfortable just being Randy and not Bob Jr.'s son. And that would be a waste, because he's already accomplished far more than his father ever did in far less time.

(Dr. Sidney M. Basil contributed to this article.) □

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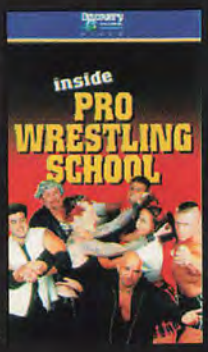

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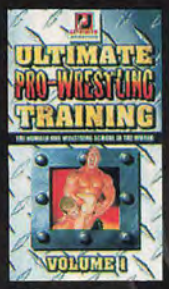

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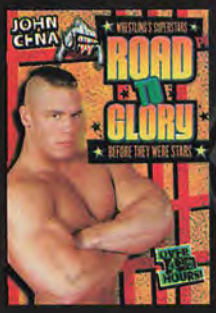

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REPORT CARDS 2005 ◆ REPORT CARDS 2005 ◆ REPORT CARDS 2005 ◆

JOHN CENA

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Cena has been on a roll ever since beating JBL for the WWE title at WrestleMania 21 and then transitioning seamlessly to Raw. The champ turned back the challenge of a rejuvenated Chris Jericho, has consistently humiliated Raw General Manager Eric Bischoff, and stood up to Kurt Angle. Cena's efforts to become a crossover star have met with somewhat more modest success. His *You Can't See Me* rap CD and tour have done fairly well, but he's far from the ubiquitous mainstream presence The Rock and Steve Austin became while atop WWE. Wrestling-wise, Cena's done everything he's set out to do. A convincing argument could be made that Cena has had an even better year than Batista. **GRADE: A**

MARKETABILITY: While his white rapper persona turns off some people, the raucous reaction from the Chain Gang every time the champ is in the house attests to his strong connection with fans. Cena and Batista are the centerpieces of WWE's drive to create a new generation of diehard wrestling fans. The campaign has been at least partially successful, for which Cena deserves his share of credit. Among younger fans especially, there's not a more popular wrestler to be found in WWE than Cena, spinning title belt and all. **GRADE: A**

REPERTOIRE: Cena's style doesn't endear him to wrestling purists. He relies almost exclusively on power moves and doesn't always execute them as crisply as possible. His FU finisher and five-knuckle shuffle are colorfully named and get the job done, but they're really little more than a fireman's carry/bodyslam combination and a fistdrop, respectively. Cena, however, is so explosive that he overwhelms opponents. And when he needs to, he can wrestle a bit, too. If Cena can humble Angle, the best technical wrestler of his generation, even his harshest critics will have to rethink the notion that the champion's unorthodox style will eventually lead to his downfall. **GRADE: C**

CAREER GROWTH: Given all his accomplishments, it's hard to believe Cena has only been a pro for five years. Wrestlers tend to enter their primes later than most other athletes, so the 28-year-old Cena figures to improve across the board over the next few years. That's an exciting thought for WWE and his Chain Gang, but a scary one for Cena's enemies. **GRADE: A**

OVERALL VALUE: With the WWE now back on the USA Network, the pressure on Cena to stay at the top of his game is greater than ever. While it would hardly be the end of the world for Cena if he dropped the title to the likes of Kurt Angle, the future will really look bright if Cena emerges from their title series still holding the gold aloft and proclaiming, "The champ is here!" **GRADE: A**

CHRIS MASTERS

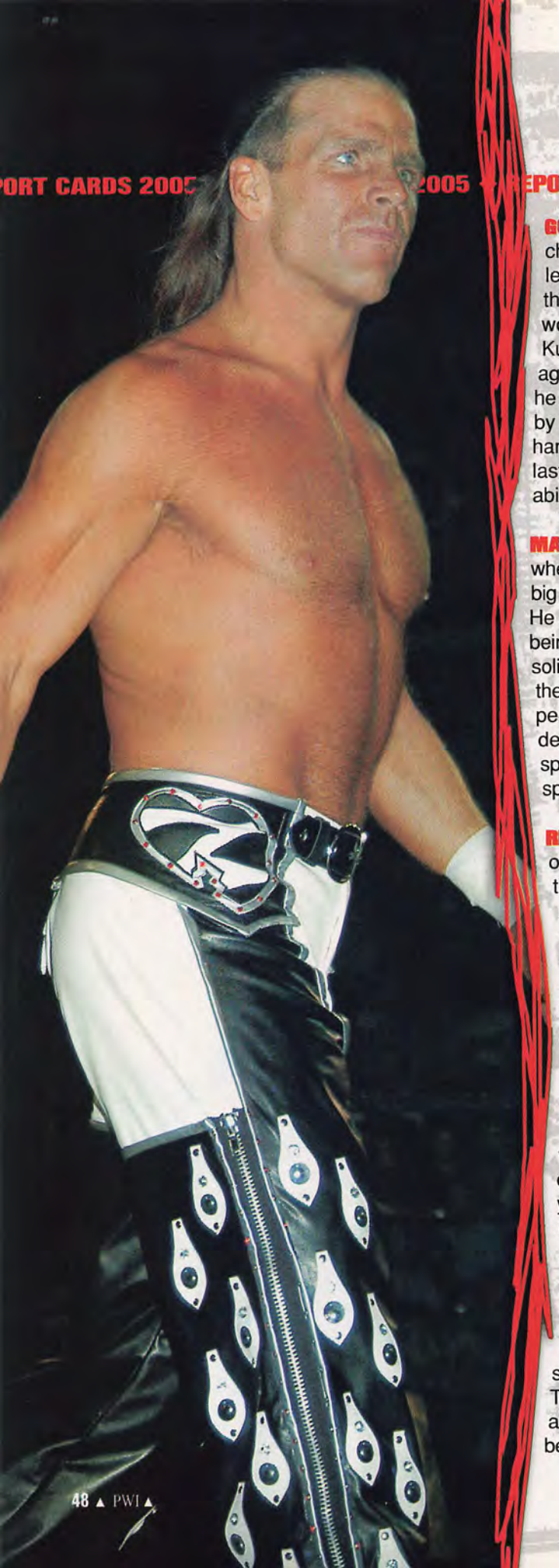
GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Chris Masters seemed to have one thing on his mind last year—getting everyone in WWE to notice his awesome power and impressive physique. If that, indeed, was his goal for 2005, his over-the-top ring entrance and Masterlock Challenges helped him achieve it in spades. Using little more than a full-nelson, Masters dared everyone to try to overpower him. Masters was so confident in his abilities that he offered thousands of dollars to anyone who could escape his Masterlock. So far, nobody has. The bottom line is he was basically a nobody at the start of the year … and a key player for Raw by summer's end. He got noticed. **GRADE: A**

MARKETABILITY: With his chiseled body, looks, and swagger, Masters should have been plastered all over everything WWE. But his inability to stay in the company's upper echelon and his middling talking skills prevented WWE from maxing out on his potential in 2005. He's been given ample time to make a huge splash, but so far he hasn't done enough to leave fans or the mainstream media begging for more. Give him time, though. **GRADE: C**

REPERTOIRE: The primary reason Masters failed to win a lot of big matches last year was his sparse in-ring repertoire. Masters can kick, punch, and clamp on a full-nelson. And there are a few other solid power moves in his arsenal. It might be enough to win matches against some Raw mid-carders, but it's not enough to become a consistent main-eventer or eventual champion. The fans—and more importantly, Vince McMahon—know a one-trick pony when they see one. Last year, Masters feuded with Shawn Michaels for several months. He learned a few things and kept up with HBK better than a lot of people expected, but he still has a long way to go. **GRADE: D**

CAREER GROWTH: As 2005 wore on, Masters progressed from participating in weekly Masterlock Challenges on *Raw* to an occasional *Raw* main event. But he didn't take full advantage of the platform. Most of those matches were tag team matches in which some of his weaknesses could be hidden. Unfortunately for Masters, his progress in the ring didn't quite match his profile, but his career reached a new level nevertheless. **GRADE: B**

OVERALL VALUE: Let's face it—Vince McMahon likes young, muscular performers. Chris Master is young and muscular, so it wasn't surprising that he got so much TV time in 2005. He might have been pushed too hard too quickly for his own good, but he could overcome that. McMahon clearly wants him to succeed. That aside, it would be hard to argue that Master earned that coveted "future of the sport" tag. His grade in this category in 2006, after he's gotten another year of experience, will tell us a lot more about him. **GRADE: C**



SHAWN MICHAELS

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Titles were an afterthought to Michaels in 2005. No, the last year was all about building a legacy for HBK, and he certainly accomplished that. Not that he hadn't already built a pretty good one through his work in previous years, but with a high-profile victory over Kurt Angle and a wonderful performance in a losing effort against Hulk Hogan at SummerSlam, Michaels proved that he deserves to be remembered among the all-time greats by wrestling fans. Coming back from a neck injury at the hands of Kane to compete in so many high-profile matches last year was a testament not only to Michaels' legendary abilities, but also his legendary heart. **GRADE: A**

MARKETABILITY: Michaels was one of WWE's go-to guys when it came to boosting pay-per-view buy rates last year (no big surprise there), and he certainly lived up to expectations. He and Hogan deserve most of the credit for SummerSlam being such a box office bonanza. In 2005, "The Showstopper" solidified his reputation for turning in great performances when the spotlight shines brightest. But whether it's his faith-based perspective or desire for privacy, Shawn didn't make a big deal of his renewed prominence—at least not outside the sport. Michaels' modesty may have deprived WWE and the sport of some mainstream pub. **GRADE: B**

REPERTOIRE: You won't catch Shawn rappelling into the ring on a 70-foot cable anymore. But his matches in 2005 showed that he can still deliver his trademark maneuver—sweet chin music—with as much force and precision as ever. He can also dial up an aerial or high-risk move without tweaking his oft-injured back. Michaels, if nothing else, displayed tremendous versatility and adaptability in 2005. Just ask Kurt Angle, who probably underestimated Michaels' skills just a bit. Only a true professional like HBK can find the flexibility to remain so brilliant in the ring for so long. **GRADE: A**

CAREER GROWTH: Remaining a flagship performer in WWE at his age was impressive enough. That left Michaels with only one more mountain to climb—cementing his legacy. Michaels solidified his status as a wrestling icon last year. Only another World/WWE title victory and dominant championship reign in 2005 could have been more impressive. But he didn't need that. **GRADE: A**

OVERALL VALUE: Is there any question that WWE knows where its bread is buttered? Michaels is that rare breed of current superstar with years of greatness behind him who is still vital to the current state of the sport as well as the future. The Flairs, Hogans, and Undertakers of professional wrestling are most coveted due to their scarcity. Shawn Michaels should be placed in that same category. **GRADE: A**

TRIPLE-H

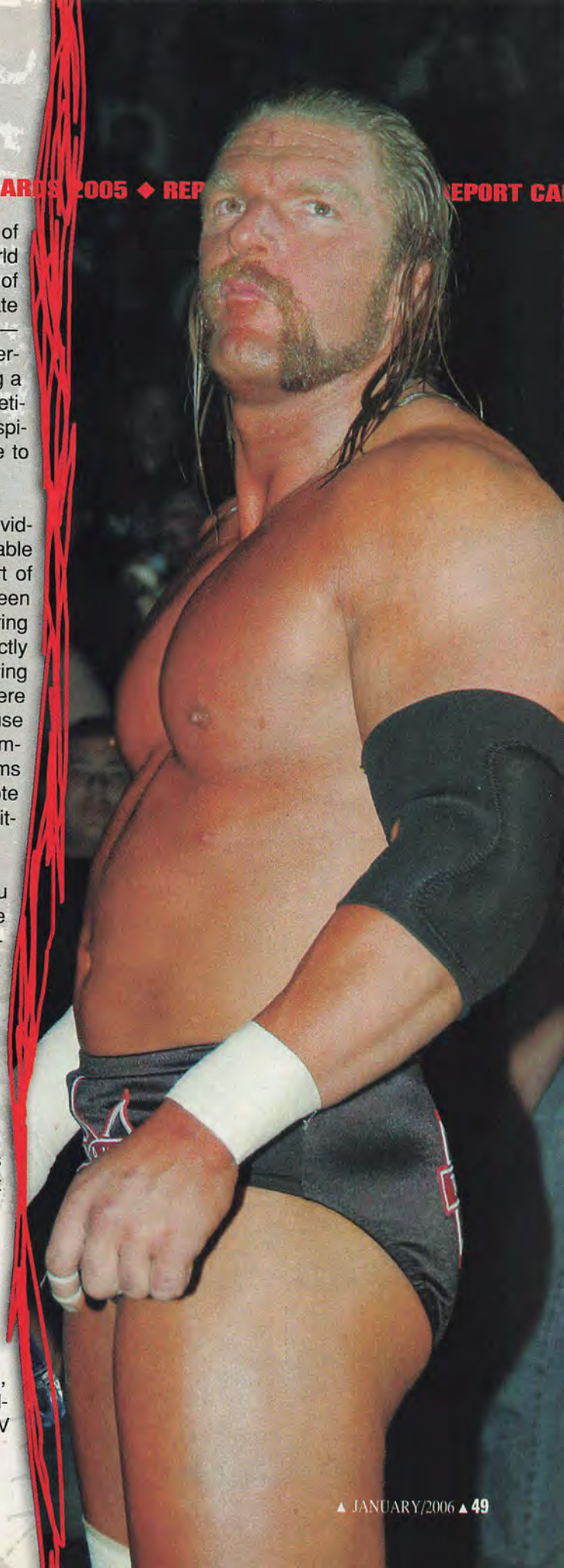
GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Triple-H has the most ambitious set of goals in wrestling. Not only does he want to hold the World (or WWE) title, but he wants to overshadow the legacy of his hero, Ric Flair. Good luck, pal. "The Game" is fortunate in that he has something no other WWE superstar does—the benefit of time. Having Vince McMahon has his father-in-law means Triple-H doesn't have to worry about getting a pink slip. He doesn't *have to* push as hard as other competitors because he knows title shots will come. He's like a spider in a web. If he waits long enough, his prey will come to him. And when it does, he'll be ready. **GRADE: B**

MARKETABILITY: As with Jeff Jarrett, many insiders are divided about whether Triple-H is one of WWE's most marketable stars. He has sold tons of merchandise and been a part of some of WWE's most viewed matches, but he has also seen TV ratings, PPV buys, and event attendance dwindle during his days on top (which can't necessarily be blamed directly on him). That's part of the double-edged sword of marrying Stephanie McMahon. No matter how good Triple-H is, there will always be people who insist he did what he did because of the influence he has. Still, you can't argue with the number of Triple-H T-shirts out there, and Hunter always seems to pop up in mainstream magazines to favorably promote WWE. Despite his shortcomings and the protests of his critics, HHH equals money. **GRADE: A**

REPERTOIRE: Hunter has been a heel for so long that you forget just how skilled he can be. Over the years, we have seen him apply dozens of submission holds, from sharpshooters to Indian deathlocks and crossfaces to figure-four leglocks. He has matched power with the monsters and gone hold-for-hold with the scientific marvels. We're just frustrated that he still feels the need to use a sledgehammer so often. **GRADE: A**

CAREER GROWTH: Triple-H is the man to beat in WWE. He has been at the top for the past five years or so, and there's really not much higher he can go. That being said, he has gone more than six months without a championship belt around his waist, so he has been in a bit of a lull. **GRADE: B**

OVERALL VALUE: Triple-H is the most valuable wrestler on the WWE roster in that he is an accomplished main-eventer with name recognition to mainstream fans. Does he do enough to elevate young talent? Probably not. Is he very protective of his spot at the top? Probably to a fault at times. Even when you factor in those negatives, however, you can't argue that WWE doesn't need him. Admit it—you missed him when he took his hiatus from TV this summer/fall. **GRADE: A**



EDGE

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Edge has become one of Raw's most controversial figures, a role he seems to relish and use to his advantage. The more bent Edge's opponents are on destroying him, the more Edge and Lita egg them on. Amazingly, Edge scored decisive victories over the dangerous Kane in both a cage match and a stretcher match—two bouts in which Kane had an advantage on paper. Edge followed that up by getting the best of Matt Hardy in one of most violent and intensely personal feuds WWE (or any promotion) has seen in years. With the exception of dropping a cage match to Hardy at Unforgiven, Edge won nearly every showdown, including a loser-leaves-Raw ladder match at "Homecoming." The only thing Edge hasn't done of late is win a title. **GRADE: A**

MARKETABILITY: With the exception of Triple-H, JBL, and, arguably, Randy Orton, there's hardly a wrestler on the WWE roster whom fans (and certain fellow wrestlers) would more like to see left laying in the ring than Edge. When a heel wrestler makes fans' blood boil, he's gold to his promotion. **GRADE: A**

REPERTOIRE: Edge possesses an intriguing combination of size (6'4", 240) and above-average execution ... or should we say Edge-a-cution? He also uses a spear effectively to set up a finisher. We could do without him naming so many moves after himself at various times—he'll also break out what he calls the Edge-o-matic and the Edge-a-cator—but there's no questioning their effectiveness. **GRADE: B**

CAREER GROWTH: The erstwhile tag team specialist and fan favorite has evolved into one of the top heels in WWE. But Edge now stands at a crossroads. His romantic relationship with Lita—while it brought much personal scorn down on him—has served him quite well professionally to this point. But to take the next step, Edge needs to move past blood feuds into the WWE title picture. At some point, as he transitions from being the hunted (Kane and Hardy feuds) to the hunter (a title challenger), having Lita around might become more of a distraction than a help. **GRADE: A**

OVERALL VALUE: Like him or hate him, Edge is just entering the prime of his career and has established himself as one of the top performers in WWE. It would not be at all shocking if he won the WWE title in the near future. He'll need to do that sooner or later to keep his momentum going. It'll be hard to match the intensity and ferocity of his feud with Hardy. And a sudden change of direction from heel back to fan favorite is unlikely. Edge's image would need a lot of repair. If Lita turned her back on him or another heel were to jump him, most fans would think Edge only got what he deserved. **GRADE: A**

CARLITO

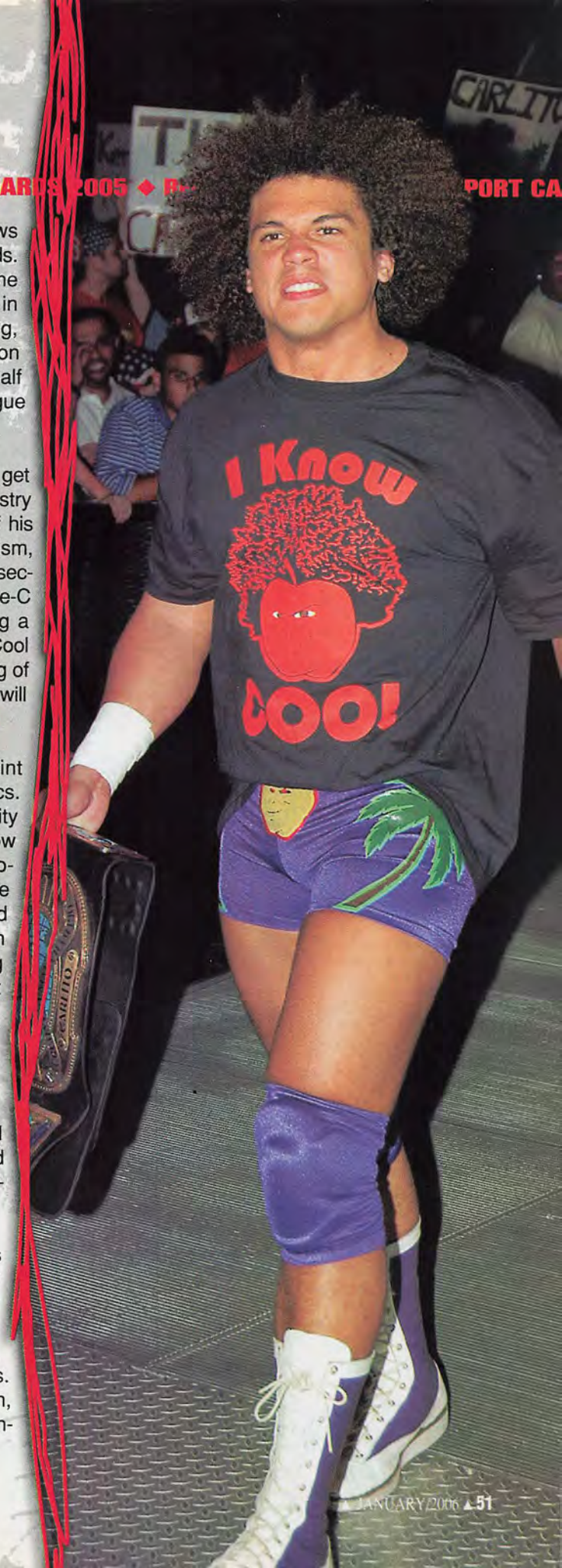
GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Carlito Caribbean Cool sure knows how to make an impact. He's done that on both WWE brands. In his first televised Smackdown match, Carlito captured the U.S. title. But that was last year. To prove it was no fluke, in his first televised Raw match after being drafted this spring, he captured the Intercontinental championship from Shelton Benjamin. All he really wanted to do during the second half of 2005 was become a major player with Raw. We'd argue that he achieved that goal in style. **GRADE: A**

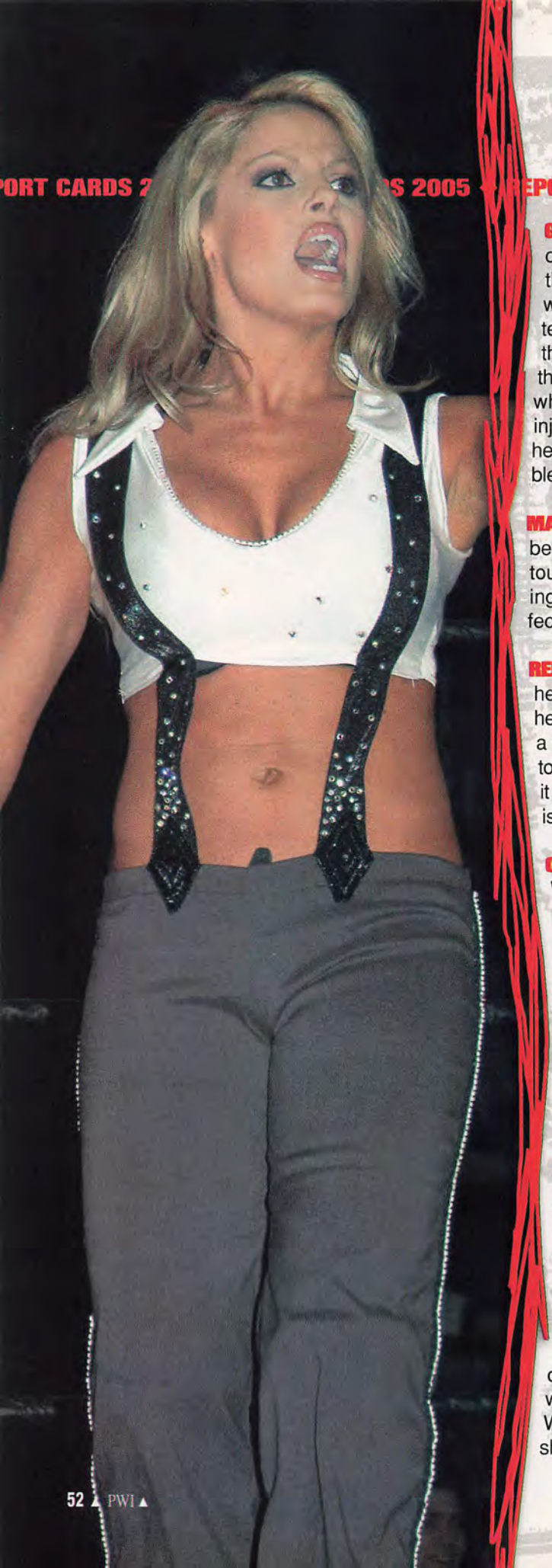
MARKETABILITY: The apple orchards of America should get together and thank Carlito for helping to make their industry cool. With an apple from which to bite, an afro the size of his native Puerto Rico, and that classic spitting, *uh*, mannerism, there's little that *can't* be marketed when it comes to this second-generation wrestler. As our report card came due, Triple-C had begun selling his Bad Apple T-shirts and was getting a good response to them. This is another category in which Cool excels. Although he's a heel, when you look at the marketing of other wrestlers on the Raw roster compared to him, Carlito will tell you that it's like comparing apples to oranges. **GRADE: A**

REPERTOIRE: Admittedly, this is not Carlito's strong point yet. He's not exactly famous for putting on five-star clinics. Then again, it could be argued that his charisma and ability to perform under pressure outweigh that. He began to grow as our grading period came to a close, though. In September 2005, Cool's feud with Ric Flair played out, and he showed the world what he could do when put into a solid feud with a strong, experienced opponent. The bottom line on this one is that Carlito probably has more ring skills than he lets most opponents see yet. That might actually be part of his strategy. **GRADE: C**

CAREER GROWTH: Carlito is on his way to being more than just another two-bit player for a brand that can forget mid-carders quicker than it can make them. Recently, during WWE's big move to the USA Network, the company featured Cool alongside Triple-H and John Cena in many ads. Billed as "The Bad Apple," Carlito has the distinctive look and persona that could take him places quickly. **GRADE: A**

OVERALL VALUE: This second-generation wrestler has gone out of his way to force us to appreciate his worth. By making such huge splashes in his initial appearances for the two WWE brands, the big-haired assassin solidified his value to the company. No one can stop this young sensation from achieving his dream, or at least so he says. He has a good thing going right now, and as time goes on, we expect he's only going to improve and move into contention for the WWE title. Cool? Cool. **GRADE: B**





TRISH STRATUS

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Trish has held the WWE women's championship since New Year's Revolution. She has been the most dominant woman wrestler in the U.S. and is the woman after whom most other aspiring female wrestlers pattern themselves. She has done all she can do in wrestling at this point. Six women's titles, WWE's Diva of the Decade for the 1990s, *PWI's* Woman of the Year for 2002 and 2003—what else do you want? Trish missed five months due to injury in 2005 and never got revenge on Lita after Kane beat her then-charge Viscera at Backlash, but those are the only blemishes on an otherwise-impeccable record. **GRADE: B**

MARKETABILITY: It simply isn't possible for a WWE diva to be any more marketable than Trish. So darn sexy and yet so tough, with fantastic wrestling skills and an outgoing, engaging personality. She's like a buxom alien from Planet Perfection. **GRADE: A**

REPERTOIRE: Trish has been extremely effective in setting up her Stratusfaction finisher with either the running bulldog or her vaunted chick kicks (or a combination of the two). She isn't a scientific marvel like Benoit or Regal, but she knows enough to slip out of a submission hold before her opponent can lock it in, to duck a move *Matrix* style, or to get to the ropes if she is in trouble. Generally, that is all she needs. **GRADE: A**

CAREER GROWTH: Trish is looking for new challenges, but WWE just isn't throwing any her way. She is too talented to be feuding with models with just a few months of pro training. Admittedly, Victoria is a worthy contender, but Trish has beaten her several times. If Victoria gets an unlimited number of title shots, she'll eventually win the belt due to the law of averages alone. WWE isn't doing Trish any favors. It's letting her go too long without a challenge, which can rob her of her competitive advantage. WWE is letting her grow stagnant, and that is simply a crime. **GRADE: C**

OVERALL VALUE: Trish's value might be slightly diminished because of all the divas WWE has brought in courtesy of the diva searches. After all, a case could be made that Trish is not only not the hottest woman in WWE, but she might not even crack the top five. We would disagree, but with so many beautiful women around WWE, Trish just isn't unique. Of course, she is one of only three WWE women who can really wrestle (along with Victoria and Lita), but WWE hasn't shown much commitment to the women's division lately. Trish is still invaluable because she's a great wrestler, a gorgeous woman, and exactly the type of lady WWE would like to promote to the mainstream media. But she's not the irreplaceable diva she once was. **GRADE: B**

KURT ANGLE

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Although not without its highlights, 2005 was not a stellar year for Angle. On the bright side, Angle forced Shawn Michaels to tap out in a phenomenal WrestleMania 21 match. But the Olympic gold medalist then spent much of the year toying with decidedly less accomplished wrestlers who participated in the Kurt Angle Invitational, trying to win Angle's gold medal. Angle even briefly lost the medal to Eugene. Yes, Angle recovered it, but he put himself in a no-win situation from the start. Angle's move from Smackdown to Raw paid dividends when he shifted his focus to where it should have been all along—trying to unseat John Cena for the WWE title. **GRADE: C**

MARKETABILITY: While he's unlikely to have the professional longevity enjoyed by Danny Hodge, Verne Gagne, Jack Brisco, or Bob Backlund, it's reasonable to say Angle is the most accomplished amateur ever to make the successful leap to the pro ranks. What's more, Angle is more charismatic than any of the aforementioned grapplers. His intensity allows him to perform as either a never-say-die fan favorite or a vicious heel, depending on his current direction. Angle is widely regarded as the very best in his profession, and he continues to be a great spokesman for the company when called upon. **GRADE: A**

REPERTOIRE: There's no one in the sport with a more complete arsenal of suplexes, takedowns, and submission holds than Angle. He can apply his anklelock in a hurry and when he does, the match is usually over within a few seconds. He complements that finisher with above-average power and the ability to outslug an opponent in a brawl. The only thing that sometimes holds Angle back is his tendency to start slowly and waste time taunting the opposition. When Angle finally feels threatened, he pulls down the shoulder straps on his singlet and rallies. **GRADE: A**

CAREER GROWTH: It's hard to believe Angle has been a pro for six years. While he spent much of 2005 going in circles, he did so with much tumult and shouting. At 37, he still could be a few years away from the downside of his career. Nevertheless, Angle can't afford to spend another year basically looking to keep himself amused. Cena presents the one and only challenge he needs to worry about. At some point, Angle might also cross paths with Batista, whose size and power would present a stylistic dilemma. **GRADE: C**

OVERALL VALUE: Terry Funk has said that at its best, pro wrestling offers a little bit of everything: athleticism, showmanship, action, drama, comedy, believability, and sheer lunacy. Vince McMahon has rarely put a premium on the wrestling credibility of his roster, but Angle is a special case. Great on the mike, even better in the ring. **GRADE: A**

RIC FLAIR

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: A 17th world title wasn't in the cards for Flair in 2005. So like all aging superstars, Flair's primary objective was to stay relevant. He accomplished that by remaining aligned with Triple-H, arguably the top star in WWE. That partnership dissolved when Triple-H, following a three-month-plus hiatus, attacked Flair at "Homecoming." The "Nature Boy" took a horrific beating, but he emerged in a no-lose situation. So he's standing across the ring from Triple-H instead of in his corner. Bottom line: He's still tied to Triple-H, and that will keep him near the top of the card. Plus, Flair turned a personal affront on "Carlito's Cabana" into his first Intercontinental title reign. *Whoooooo!* **GRADE: B**

MARKETABILITY: He had success with his *To Be The Man* autobiography and DVD in the last few years. And he still has the Flair name to trade on. That's what 33 years of greatness will do for you. But time has taken its toll, so even his staunchest fans realize the jet-flyin', limousine-ridin', kiss-stealin', wheelin'-dealin' son of a gun persona he tries to effect is a stretch at this point. While Flair did give the requisite newspaper and radio interviews in 2005, he didn't really use his stature to increase his visibility in the mainstream press. And even though Flair was involved in several main events, he wasn't the main attraction. **GRADE: B**

REPERTOIRE: A valid complaint shared by fans and fellow performers is that Flair was incapable of turning in anything other than a "Ric Flair" match. That meant plenty of knife-edge chops, eyepokes, awkward back bodydrops, figure-fours, and flips over the turnbuckle. And don't forget the begging off and bleeding. Once upon a time, that fare was more than enough to overcome foes and keep fans on the edge of their seats. In 2005 (and probably before that), Flair's in-ring game became a bit too predictable. **GRADE: C**

CAREER GROWTH: How much growth can we expect from a 56-year-old 16-time former world champion? Probably about as much as Flair delivered. The Intercontinental title doesn't have the same prestige it once did. But it did afford Flair a sense of accomplishment. And because there were fewer avenues for a wrestler of his age to advance his career, his victory over Carlito and subsequent title defenses shouldn't be underestimated. **GRADE: C**

OVERALL VALUE: By virtue of his association with Triple-H and his I-C title reign, Flair increased his value to WWE, though not in a huge way. Still, a living legend like Flair, even at 56, is worth a lot to any promotion lucky enough to have him. Yes, he's slower in the ring. Yes, he's predictable. And, sure, his boastfulness belies the ravages of time on his body. However, he'll always get a wonderful crowd reaction. So Flair was still a key member of the Raw roster in 2005. **GRADE: B**

ROB CONWAY

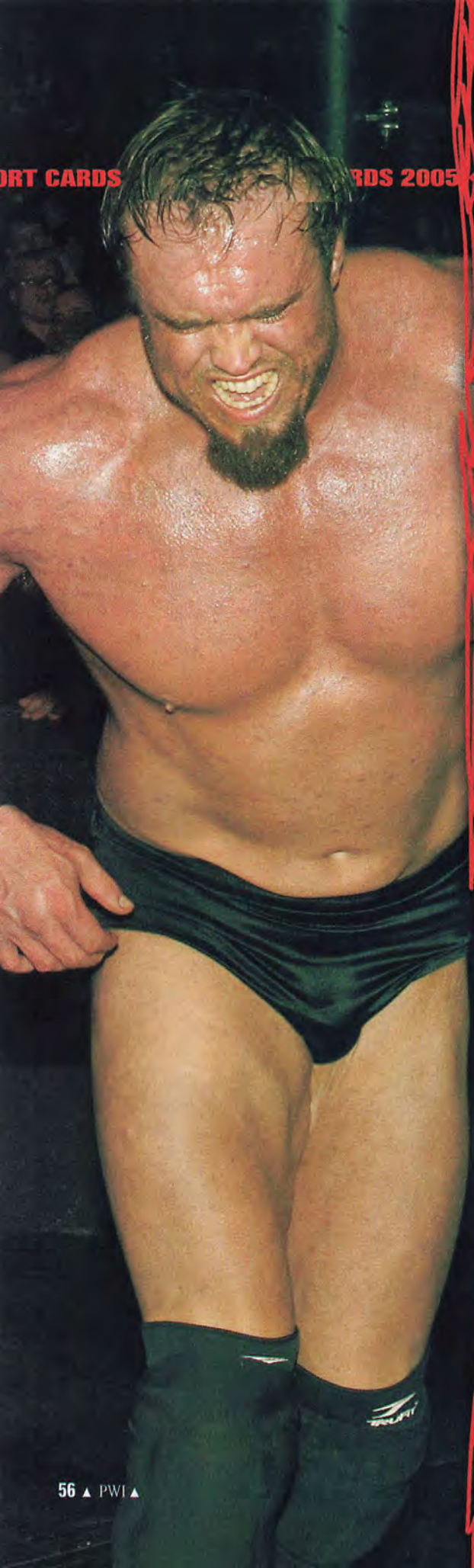
GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Let's break this category into two time periods. From January through June, La Resistance had a three-week reign as Raw tag team champions and spent the next four months squabbling and mostly losing matches. But since Conway finally split with Sylvan Grenier and became "The Con Man," he has successfully distanced himself from his persona as a sniveling Francophile and remade himself into one of the freshest and most arrogant young prospects on the Raw roster. **GRADE: B**

MARKETABILITY: It's really too soon to tell whether "The Con Man" can or will become a marketable character. Conway is dangerously close to becoming one of those cheesy characters that ruled WWE in the early-1990s. Couldn't you just see The Con Man teaming with The Repo Man, for instance? But anyone willing to get into a ring filled with wrestling legends, as Conway did at the *"Raw* Homecoming" card in October, and say the show wasn't an "old folks homecoming" definitely has some comic potential, not to mention guts. Those are very marketable qualities. Plus, he has plenty of sex appeal … or so the ladies tell us. **GRADE: B**

REPERTOIRE: Conway's grappling skills haven't quite kept pace with his growing arrogance. He likes to target the neck and head with his array of neckbreakers and DDTs, and his ego trip finisher is impressive. But he's an old-fashioned brawler and not very adept at catch-as-catch-can or aerial styles. He needs to diversify a bit to succeed against well-rounded wrestlers like Shelton Benjamin and Edge. **GRADE: C**

CAREER GROWTH: Conway went from teaming with Nick "Eugene" Dinsmore in Ohio Valley Wrestling to tag team gold in WWE in 2004. Now he has put that behind him and is bravely stepping out on his own, and starting to make headway as a singles competitor. Really, Conway is following the ideal career path. He makes more and more progress with each small step he takes. Barring a critical misstep (such as forming a new tag team or instigating a feud with Kane or The Big Show), Conway should continue to develop into a bona fide title contender. **GRADE: A**

OVERALL VALUE: Right now, Conway isn't that important a player on the Raw brand, but we expect big things out of him. The fact that he was tapped to interrupt the legends ceremony on the biggest *Raw* of the year shows us that WWE Creative probably has big plans for Conway. With a little more polish and some more time on the mike, Conway could develop into the next Carlito and become a fixture as Intercontinental champion. But if he tries to push himself too far too fast, it could ruin him. **GRADE: B**



GENE SNITSKY

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Snitsky burst into wrestling fans' consciousness by torturing Lita and Kane in 2004. Most wrestlers would have used that success to advance their careers. Snitsky used it to reveal his foot fetish. Not a great leap forward in 2005 for big Gene. A more expected progression would have seen Snitsky work his way into I-C title contention and maybe even earn World or WWE title shots (he got one match with John Cena on *Raw* and lost). Instead, Snitsky seemed content to bounce around the mid-card and try his hand at some table and hardcore matches. In 2005, it appeared as if he didn't set any goals, much less achieve them. A man of his size and ferocity should have accomplished more. **GRADE: D**

MARKETABILITY: Snitsky is a scary-looking dude with a frightening persona. But he comes off more sick than sinister, and fans aren't sure what to think. Apparently, lighting Jim Ross on fire is cool in a way that causing a miscarriage isn't—although chants of, "It wasn't my fault!" nearly caught on. Selling an ugly, baby-killing, foot-sniffing maniac to the masses is tough. Maybe WWE should have played up his legitimate athletic background. **GRADE: C**

REPERTOIRE: Not much to speak of here. Snitsky is a big man that relies on a big man's game—anything that lets him use his size and strength. That approach worked well against smaller opponents. But he was clearly outclassed by Kane and Big Show. Also, the mental gymnastics he uses to try to psych out opponents lost some of their impact as 2005 wore on. **GRADE: C**

CAREER GROWTH: If 2005 was an indication of what's to come for Snitsky, he seems destined to be one of those "glue guys" championship teams always talk about—mediocre wrestlers whose unspectacular performances allow more talented folks to shine. You really have to question Snitsky's priorities, if not his sanity. Instead of reading poetry at Edge and Lita's wedding, for example, he could have challenged Edge to a "Money In The Bank" ladder match. In the end, all Snitsky got for his efforts was a whiff of Lita's dogs. If that's all he wanted, 2005 was a smashing success. **GRADE: D**

OVERALL VALUE: To be fair, "glue guys" are necessary to any organization's success. Not every performer can be a superstar. Snitsky proved that last year. But that doesn't mean he was a waste of a roster spot. WWE needs big, able-bodied men that can compel fans to watch them. As disgusting as they were, Snitsky's exploits compelled fans to watch at times. Besides, WWE must cultivate potential opponents aside from Kurt Angle for wildly popular WWE champ John Cena. Problem was, Snitsky didn't do much in 2005 to indicate he's ready to make that step. So you'd have to wonder coming out of 2005, just how valuable was he? **GRADE: C**

SNITSKY vs. JOHN CENA

Photo By George Napolitano

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KANE

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Kane spent too much time last year battling mid-card performers such as Edge and Snitsky instead of mounting a concerted effort to win the World or WWE title. WWE got lots of mileage from the bizarre and complicated Edge-Lita-Kane love triangle (before Matt Hardy returned), but for a man of Kane's size and skills, spoiling an in-ring wedding shouldn't be the highlight of any year. And he shouldn't have struggled to the degree that he did against Edge. We didn't expect him to dominate every match, but we expected more from him in the stretcher and cage matches the two men had. **GRADE: D**

MARKETABILITY: Kane was one of the latest WWE superstars to make his way to Hollywood, devoting time from his 2005 schedule to film *See No Evil,* which is tentatively set to be released in March 2006. Assuming his performance is at least decent, that should only endear him even more to WWE fans, who showed last year that they enjoy rather than reject his evil, sadistic exploits. **GRADE: B**

REPERTOIRE: Early in 2005, Kane added an illegal, but rather effective maneuver to his repertoire. He'd lodge opponents' heads in the hinges of a folding chair and deliver a legdrop from the top rope. He wasn't able to incorporate the maneuver into many of his matches, but the move did put both Shawn Michaels and Snitsky on the injured reserve list for a while. Aside from this advance, Kane used his old staples: kicks, punches, choke-slams, clotheslines, and the occasional tombstone piledriver. "The Big Red Machine" is the kind of wrestler who would stand to benefit in a huge way by adding two or three new holds/moves to his arsenal. He didn't do that in 2005. **GRADE: C**

CAREER GROWTH: By virtue of his appearance in *See No Evil,* Kane has set himself up for good things in the future. But in the confines of a WWE ring, he didn't do much to convince WWE honchos that he's championship material. He seems destined to be a guy who makes his living just below the main event level. Kane seems happiest when he's playing head games with other WWE superstars or inflicting his insidious brand of violence on them. Hasn't it always been that way? **GRADE: C**

OVERALL VALUE: Despite a lackluster in-ring year for Kane, he increased his value to WWE by getting into movies. But that shouldn't overshadow the contribution he made in terms of Raw feuds. His evil persona provided WWE Creative with ample opportunity to get Kane involved in some compelling storylines in 2005. Look at it this way: Watching Rob Conway, for example, get the tables turned on him by Lita just wouldn't have been as interesting. **GRADE: B**

VISCERA

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Viscera just wanted to get his name back out there in 2005. Honestly, we didn't think that was likely at all, but surprise—his love machine gimmick made that happen. Still, big Vis maxed out at the middle of the mid-card and became better known for what his character supposedly did in the bedroom than what he accomplished in the ring. Regardless, wrestling fans talked about Viscera for the first time in a long time last year. Heck, we could even argue that he was one of the year's top guilty pleasures for a lot of fans. **GRADE: B**

MARKETABILITY: WWE pushed Viscera as far as he could go as a ladies man. (Who knew smoking jackets were made in his size?) Even Vince McMahon couldn't find a way to sustain a lot of enthusiasm for a 500-pound African-American that sports a blond mohawk and ice-blue eyes. Viscera's push was fun in small doses while it lasted, but it was a stretch to believe that Trish Stratus—or even Lilian Garcia—would ever fall for him. And WWE was wise not to try to sell us Viscera T-shirts or other merchandise featuring his likeness. They probably wouldn't have been hot sellers. Let's face it: Viscera could only go so far at this stage of his career. Last year he got there. **GRADE: B**

REPERTOIRE: Splashes, splashes, and a lot more splashes. That was pretty much all we got—and all we should have expected to get—out of Viscera in 2005. You could say he added that repulsive, grinding thing to his act. But that move seemed to disgust a lot more people than it entertained. Just as Viscera's look limited his marketability, his physical conditioning limited him in the ring. Relatively speaking, Viscera played his hand rather well. **GRADE: B**

CAREER GROWTH: When was the last time fans really gave a hoot about Viscera? Let's think about that one for a few seconds. Maybe not since his King Mabel days a decade ago. Viscera went from a non-roster performer to one of the promotion's more entertaining comedy wrestlers in 2005. True, his time in the spotlight was short-lived, and he didn't exactly take advantage of his newfound popularity. But there's no question Viscera helped his career in 2005. **GRADE: B**

OVERALL VALUE: Sad but true, Viscera's value to the company peaked in mid-summer, and his involvement waned as 2005 rolled on. Viscera is all about shock appeal. Now that the most shocking program for his character has been tapped, WWE will be hard-pressed to follow its own act. Unfortunately for big Vis, a wrestler with his limitations might require too much work to resuscitate. **GRADE: D**

THE BIG SHOW

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: In light of his physical tools, not to mention the massive investment WWE has made in Show, anything less than a WWE or World title reign should be unacceptable. He worked his way into contention against then-WWE champ John Bradshaw Layfield in a barbed-wire steel cage match at No Way Out, but failed to walk away with the gold. That's the closest he came to reaching his goal in 2005. He remains popular, but do fans consider Big Show a freak show or a legitimate title contender at this point? **GRADE: D**

MARKETABILITY: Big Show's freakish size and outgoing personality kept him in the mainstream media to some degree last year. He's no stranger to the talk show circuit and is never afraid to speak his mind. But in 2005, as well as in years past, Show didn't do much to cultivate that larger-than-life aura Andre the Giant had. Of course, Show's questionable conditioning and ever-changing look (clean-shaven today, goatee tomorrow) have made it difficult for WWE to put its weight squarely behind him. However, there have been rumblings about him and Kurt Angle becoming a two-man comedy team for an upcoming movie. No kidding. **GRADE: B**

REPERTOIRE: Even if his girth hadn't robbed him of a lot of his mobility, there are only so many tricks a wrestler of Show's size can pull out of his hat. Even when pushed, Show rarely ventured outside of his abilities, and relied on his choke-slam and open-handed chops to overwhelm opponents in 2005. There was little reason for him to use anything other than his natural endowments. There might soon come a time when Show will be required to shake things up, but a conservative approach served him well enough in 2005. **GRADE: B**

CAREER GROWTH: While on the Smackdown roster, Show only had one more rung to climb before he reached the top of the ladder. He fell short, but always managed to stay involved in the upper echelon. The move to Raw didn't help. On the more prominent brand, he was mired in the mid-card, fighting opponents like Snitsky. He's actually more removed from the title hunt now than this time last year. In that regard, Show's career has regressed, not grown. The most frustrating part is that every time Show looks to be in better fighting shape, he seems to take another step backward. **GRADE: C**

OVERALL VALUE: When you consider how much WWE spent to lock up Big Show for 10 years in 1999, it's difficult to envision a time when Vinnie Mac will be satisfied with the return on his investment. However, a relatively athletic giant is a commodity worth keeping. But heading in the wrong direction in 2005, as Show mostly did, can't increase his value to WWE—even if fans pop the instant his entrance music plays. **GRADE: C**

KERWIN WHITE

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: It has to be difficult to follow in the footsteps of an accomplished wrestling family, especially when your uncle is still one of the top stars in the business. There have been a few times over the years when Chavo Jr. has tried to break away from the Guerrero family name by instigating feuds with Uncle Eddie. Their most recent clash, at the 2004 Royal Rumble, was a disaster for Chavo, as Eddie destroyed him in convincing fashion. Chavo has never been the same since (and missing time due to injuries inflicted by Billy Kidman's shooting star press didn't help). But spurning his family name to become a comedy character isn't the best way to go. Even when he was an emotionally unstable heel, Chavo was respected for his talents. Kerwin White is having a hard time earning respect from anyone except his caddy. **GRADE: C**

MARKETABILITY: Chavo has the pure skills and family name to become a draw, particularly among Hispanic fans. Kerwin White is a joke, and not a particularly funny one. WWE probably realizes that trying to sell Kerwin White golf shirts, golf clubs, or sweaters wouldn't work. **GRADE: D**

REPERTOIRE: Chavo is one of the top cruiserweights in the sport. No one can deny that. It just bewilders us that he is willing to de-emphasize all the skills he has in favor of hitting people with his golf clubs and relying on outside interference. Does he really think Kerwin White will take him to the top of WWE? **GRADE: B**

CAREER GROWTH: Obviously, we're not big fans of the Kerwin White character. It's not necessarily the gimmick. Maybe it would work with a young developmental wrestler. Mike Mondo could have made a good Kerwin White, for example. It just appears to be such a huge step backward for Chavo. He shouldn't have to rely on this sort of gimmickry to get noticed. With all the layoffs WWE has made, maybe he would have been on the chopping block if he hadn't gone along with the makeover. If that's the case, at least Chavo still has a job. But maybe leaving WWE and exploring other options would give him a better opportunity for growth. **GRADE: D**

OVERALL VALUE: Chavo is still a terrific wrestler, and WWE can count on him to deliver solid matches every time he's in the ring. But there's really no long-term value to him as Kerwin White. Maybe he could have a lot of value if one day live on *Raw,* he tore off the golf outfit and ripped WWE for forcing him to denounce his heritage. It could turn him into a hot fan favorite. We can hope. Maybe Chavo Classic will return and set him straight. **GRADE: C**

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EUGENE

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Given Eugene's limitations and volatile relationship with Raw GM Eric Bischoff, his goals for 2005 weren't clearly defined. His gold medal "victory" in Raw's Kurt Angle Invitational reminded all that he deserves to be taken seriously as a competitor. Plus, he won the affection of Christy Hemme before she was traded to Smackdown. Eugene entered 2005 as a Raw tag team champion (with William Regal), but their reign was short-lived, as Eugene botched a dropkick and blew out his knee early in the year. The injury killed Eugene's chances of capitalizing on that success. **GRADE: C**

MARKETABILITY: Eugene is still a somewhat popular character. And his ability to frustrate Angle, Muhammad Hassan, and other wrestlers certainly endeared him to some of the WWE faithful. Playing the underdog in WWE made him lovable to all for a while, but by the end of his feud with Angle, a number of people were booing him. Unfortunately, Eugene's singular appeal also limits his ability to garner mainstream press. His pre-WrestleMania *Forrest Gump* skit may have been a big hit internally, but being a creation of WWE restricts his crossover appeal. We were expecting another dimension of Eugene's character to emerge in 2005, but it never happened. **GRADE: C**

REPERTOIRE: A big part of what makes Eugene so compelling is his ability to execute complex technical or physically demanding maneuvers with instant recall. The other side of that ability is that virtually every maneuver in his arsenal is borrowed. Sure, Eugene inspires a big reaction when he Hulks up or drops a people's elbow. And a lot of fans loved it when he tried to use an Angle slam on the move's originator. Even taking his limitations and injury into account, it was not beyond reason to expect Eugene to add something new to his repertoire in 2005. He didn't. **GRADE: C**

CAREER GROWTH: All things considered, Eugene didn't do all that much to advance his career in 2005. He was twice in a position to achieve bigger and better things, but let both opportunities slip away. As noted earlier, a mistimed dropkick resulted in a dislocated kneecap, which led to the end of his tag title reign. Then he failed to capitalize on the momentum he gained by outfoxing Angle, who then destroyed Eugene at SummerSlam. **GRADE: C**

OVERALL VALUE: Eugene didn't necessarily translate into more ticket sales or pay-per-view buys for WWE in 2005. But he still served two critical functions for the company. First, he was a wrestler the fans want to put their support behind. They react to Eugene mostly positively, and that's all you can ask for from a performer. But he was also skilled enough to serve as a good test for young wrestlers looking to take that next step. However, he might need a total character overhaul to continue to be valuable in 2006. **GRADE: B**

SHELTON BENJAMIN

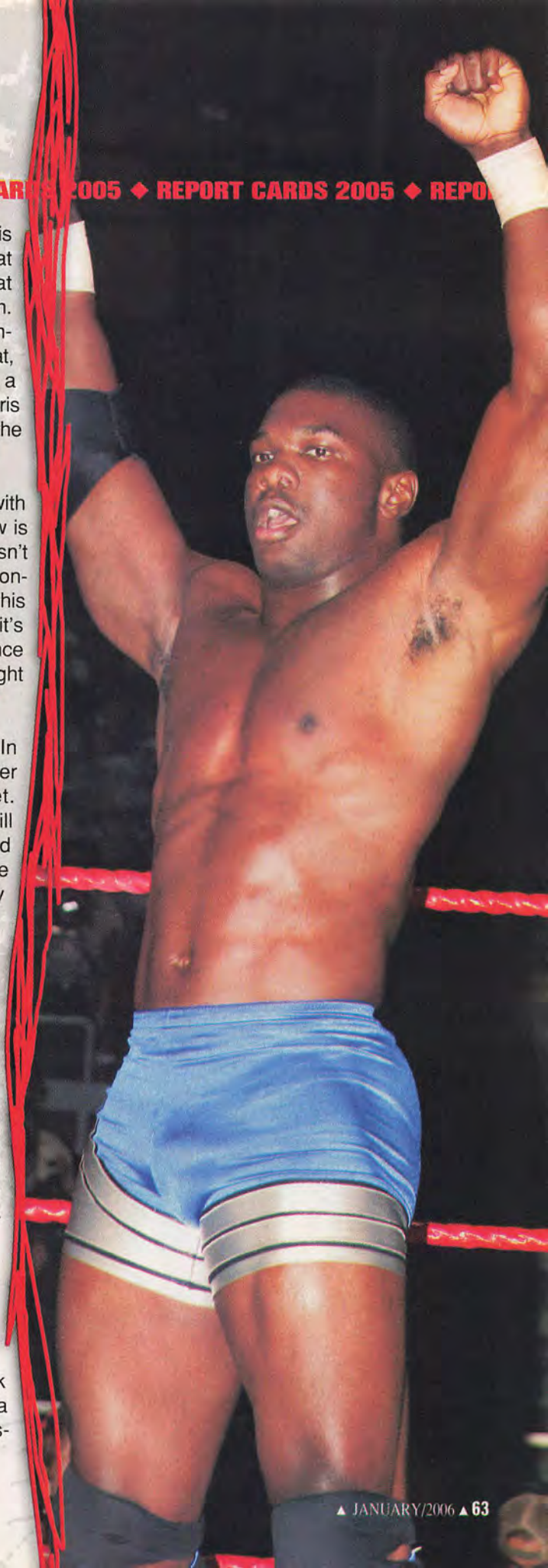
GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: For Shelton Benjamin, this category is tricky. Did he achieve his goals? Well, it depends on what those goals were. He turned in an impressive showing at WrestleMania 21's "Money In The Bank" six-way ladder match. Then again, he lost. Hey, he was also Intercontinental champion for the year's first six months. Then again, he lost that, too. Actually, by the time our grading period had come to a close, Benjamin had managed to do little except lose to Chris Masters and get beaten up by Kerwin White. Welcome to the "It's a shame, he has so much potential" club, kid. **GRADE: C**

MARKETABILITY: Benjamin is a young, good-looking kid with a style that appeals to diehard fans. The problem right now is that we don't know if Benjamin can be marketable. He hasn't had a chance to show much personality. He gets an occasional microphone time, but that's it. WWE wants to focus on his wrestling, not his talking. For now anyway. Then again, it's tough to be really marketable without being given the chance to speak and explain your motivation. It's a shame. He might be better than people think given more chances. **GRADE: C**

REPERTOIRE: This is where Benjamin can really excel. In the ring, he can hold his own with any opponent, no matter the level of ability. That's perhaps his strongest asset. Shelton could wrestle 20 opponents in 20 nights and still not cycle through all the moves in his repertoire. Plain and simple, this former collegiate All-American can wrestle. He doesn't really want to talk. You don't see that in too many wrestlers anymore. **GRADE: A**

CAREER GROWTH: It's only uphill from here for Mr. Benjamin. He still has yet to wrestle as a heel on his own in WWE. That's something for the former Intercontinental champion to think about. Another I-C title run isn't out of the question. Then again, the WWE title would look nice around his waist as well. He developed into a strong I-C champ during the year's first half, than became a forgotten man during the second half. But all he should be doing is focusing on his future. If he does, his successes could be unimaginable. The last year, though … just average on the whole. Let's just forget about that second half, though. Happy thoughts. Happy thoughts. **GRADE: C**

OVERALL VALUE: The bottom line with a guy like Benjamin is that he has value. No matter how he's portrayed or with whom he's feuding, Benjamin will try to make the most out of his situation and give 100 percent every time the bell rings. That's a quality that most matchmakers look for these days. Better to be the go-to guy when you need a good match than to be a no-to guy that never gets to wrestle on TV at all, right? **GRADE: B**



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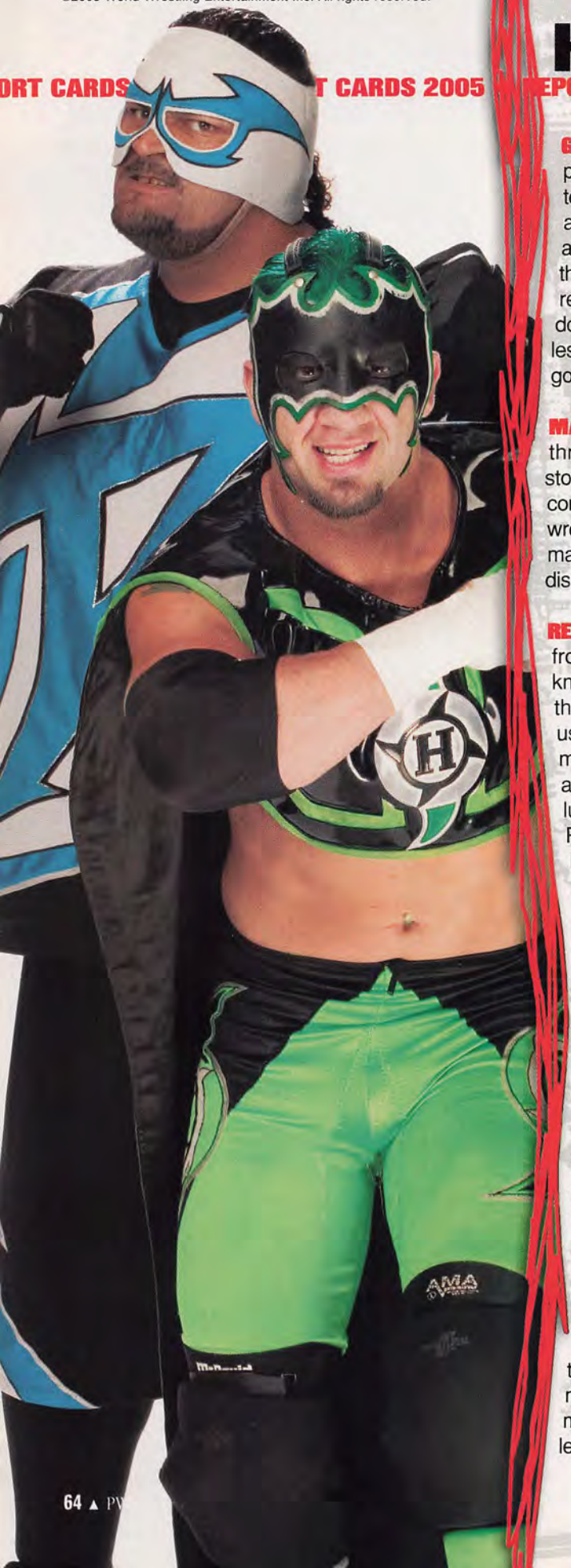

THE HURRICANE & ROSEY

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Hurricane and Rosey surprised a few people in April when they captured the Raw tag title. Long written off as silly, second-rate superheroes, the little green man and his partner in training shook off a humiliating performance against Triple-H and grabbed the gold. Although they later lost the title to Lance Cade and Trevor Murdoch, this duo definitely reached their goal. At the start of the year, even in a watered-down tag division, few expected them to win the belts, much less hold them for a prolonged period of time. It was a modest goal in 2005, but it's what they wanted. **GRADE: A**

MARKETABILITY: Stand back, there's a Hurricane coming through. That's their theme song. In a year of devastating storms that have destroyed entire cities, Hurricane and Rosey continued to come out with that blaring over the PA. It's like a wrestler in the 1930s being named "Polio." It's sort of hard to market yourself to kids when you share a name with a natural disaster that has caused so much pain to so many. **GRADE: D**

REPERTOIRE: Hurricane and young Roosevelt do stand apart from the rest of the pack. How? Well, as a unit, these two know how to combine the serious elements of wrestling with the ability to have fun. With their jovial attitudes, both men use innovative maneuvers that more hard-nosed competitors might not try. They appear to be goofing off, but in reality, it's an intelligent and innovative game plan. Opponents are lulled into a false sense of security and can get smashed by Rosey's power before they know it. Just as they're reeling, Hurricane attacks from the air. Top to bottom, you stand the chance of getting rocked when you step into the ring with Raw's resident superfriends. **GRADE: B**

CAREER GROWTH: You can't deny that these two men have figuratively leapt a tall building or two in a single bound during the last year. The success of the dynamic duo seemingly came from nowhere and showed everyone that they were serious about winning matches. It's hard for any twosome to experience a ton of career growth in WWE anymore, what with the company's de-emphasis on tag teams, but they did improve their standing. Assuming WWE doesn't do away with tag team championships altogether, the future of these two looks fairly bright, especially if they ditch the theme song. **GRADE: B**

OVERALL VALUE: Any former tag team champions almost have to have some value. In this case, Hurricane and Rosey have all the attributes necessary to achieve tag success, but they would have been more valuable in 1985, when tag teams thrived. Complementing each other's styles, they remind us of what a tag team should be. They're worth much more together than they ever would be apart. The only problems? That theme song and lack of competition. **GRADE: C**

THE HURRICANE vs. MAVEN

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VICTORIA

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Victoria seemed to be her own worst enemy last year. In a field as small as the WWE's women's division, it's not possible to ever be out of title contention. Somehow, Victoria managed to take herself out of the hunt, even when Trish Stratus was healthy and able to defend her championship. She did earn one high-profile title shot against Trish Stratus, but lost her cool and was disqualified for hitting Trish with a chair. The rest of her time was wasted on envy-driven feuds with Christy Hemme, Stacy Keibler, and 2005 diva search winner Ashley Massaro. **GRADE: C**

MARKETABILITY: WWE can't seem to make up its mind whether to push Victoria as the diva whom fans love to hate or the diva whom fans love to love. Her brief stint as the latter suggested she'd be much more marketable as a fan favorite. For a while, it seemed WWE was on board, giving Victoria skimpier outfits and more air time. But that push was short-circuited once a new crop of divas made their presence felt in WWE. Victoria does have a strong Web presence and did grant a few interviews to the mainstream press last year, but a lady with her looks and athleticism should have made a bigger impact. **GRADE: B**

REPERTOIRE: Victoria has skills in abundance. She can also brawl. Her widow's peak is one of the more memorable and effective finishing maneuvers in recent memory. It's no wonder Victoria's matches feature few comedy or T & A spots compared to other divas. It's also why she doesn't seem like a good fit in the Torrie Wilson/Candice Michelle vs. Trish Stratus/Ashley Massaro feud. Yet for all of her technical acumen and spunk, Victoria didn't accomplish very much last year. **GRADE: B**

CAREER GROWTH: Victoria hit a wall in 2005, but it probably was not her fault entirely. Clearly, WWE decision-makers weren't sure how to use her, so her career went nowhere last year. Maybe she didn't convince the higher-ups to get behind her 100 percent one way or the other. Of course, with the female ranks being so thin, all it takes is one good match on *Raw* to make her front-of-mind for WWE fans. **GRADE: C**

OVERALL VALUE: Surviving the WWE's mid-year purge should be considered a good sign for Victoria. Clearly, she wasn't deemed as expendable as Dawn Marie or Jackie Gayda. When you consider the current state of the women's division, beautiful, athletic, veteran women who connect with the fans in a big way should be very valuable, indeed. It was a tough year for Victoria, but it couldn't have hurt her standing with the company too much. **GRADE: B**

MATT HARDY

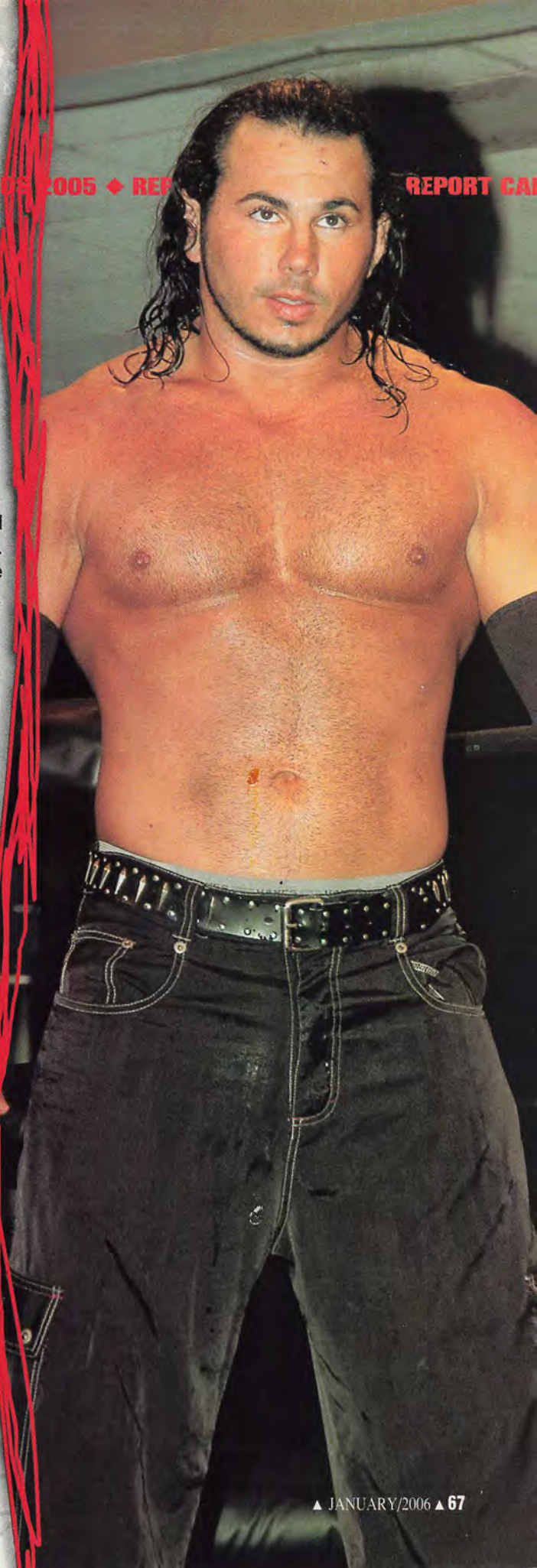
GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: A few months ago, Matt Hardy didn't have a regular job. He was fired, jilted, and alone. Since then, he's gotten hired back by WWE, feuded with the man who took his woman, and reclaimed some measure of satisfaction. Based on all that, Matt seems to have aced his goal achievement test. While many might say that he didn't beat Edge in their feud, it can also be argued that that wasn't his goal. Hardy was determined to make a dramatic return and exact revenge. That's what he did. **GRADE: B**

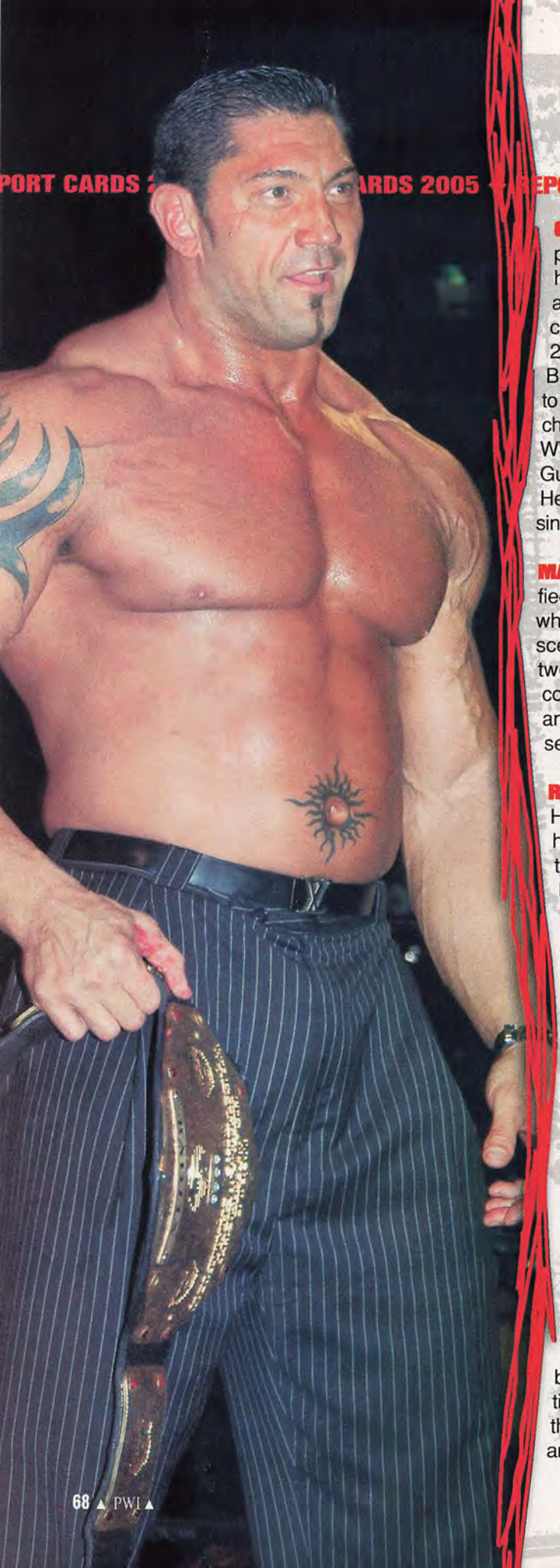
MARKETABILITY: The girls love "The Sensei Of Mattitude." That's not to say that he doesn't have male fans. He's accumulated quite a following, and it only grew when he returned to WWE with a tougher edge than he ever showed before. With a resume like Hardy's, you can't help but think that he has something pretty special going. Fans have never had a hard time shelling out money for his merchandise. **GRADE: A**

REPERTOIRE: There's no denying Matt's in-ring ability. Even people that don't like him have to admit that he has an amazing array of moves at his disposal. He spent a lot of time during the last year perfecting some new submission holds. In every contest he's ever been in, Hardy has gone out of his way to send fans home happy with his performance. And he shows the same enthusiasm and determination that he did when he was still a teenager. That translates into a well-rounded grappler who goes out of his way to upgrade his arsenal and try to learn counters for each situation. **GRADE: A**

CAREER GROWTH: This is a tricky category for Hardy. He's definitely higher in the pecking order in WWE than he was a year ago. He just had to follow a strange route to get there. Essentially, Hardy went from being a *Sunday Night Heat* semi-regular to a step or two away from main events. That's some nice career growth right there. **GRADE: B**

OVERALL VALUE: No matter how much value *we* put on Hardy, it's how WWE evaluates him that matters most. Hardy was fired because he was deemed expendable and essentially maneuvered himself back into a position to be rehired. His Internet tirades against Lita and Edge got him canned, but they also allowed his loyal fans to keep up with what was really going on, and those very vocal fans demanded that he be brought back. The McMahon family doesn't like when a wrestler allows his personal problems to become public. We'll know soon whether his move to Smackdown was a demotion or confidence on WWE's part that he can give that brand a big boost. **GRADE: B**





BATISTA

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: If these report cards had been completed midway through 2005, Batista would have earned the highest possible grade in this category. After all, he avoided all the traps Triple-H and Ric Flair set for him and went on to cleanly win the World title in the main event of WrestleMania 21. Then he beat "The Game" twice more—cleanly—on PPV. But the draft lottery slowed his momentum. John Cena came to Raw and gradually ascended to the position of top singles champion. Batista moved to Smackdown, which most consider WWE's lesser brand. There, he has dominated JBL and Eddie Guerrero, but those feuds haven't been particularly inspiring. He has to be getting frustrated at going from being WWE's top singles star to falling behind Cena. **GRADE: B**

MARKETABILITY: Batista has the superstar look and a dignified sort of class. Unlike Steve Austin, Batista is a champion who can style and profile and not have to yell or spout obscenities to get his message across. He's like a cross between Nick Bockwinkel and Superstar Graham, and even cooler than the two combined. He's a star of the first caliber, and unlike some big, muscular wrestlers, he represents himself well when he speaks. **GRADE: A**

REPERTOIRE: This is the one category that hurts big Dave. His lack of scientific skills can be forgiven given the fact that he usually uses his superhuman strength to overpower technical wrestlers before they can do much damage. But Batista's stamina is still a question mark. He got into this game relatively late in life, and while he is obviously in tremendous physical condition, it is also obvious that he didn't emphasize cardiovascular training. We're still not convinced he has enough stamina to last as champion. Once foes figure out how to avoid his opening salvos and can wrest control of the match from him, Batista is going to have show us more. **GRADE: C**

CAREER GROWTH: Okay, so the second half of the year wasn't as spectacular as the first (which also saw him oust Cena to win the Royal Rumble). The fact is, he's still the World champion and still a main event wrestler, even if moving from Raw to Smackdown was a small step backward (one he couldn't control). He, rather than Cena, could be WWE's franchise player, but he still moved up in a big way in 2005. **GRADE: A**

OVERALL VALUE: Batista is a genuine superstar. He looks like a champion. He acts like a champion. He is a great ambassador for WWE with the mainstream media. He also sells tickets and merchandise. Despite some of his shortcomings in the ring, he is one of the most valuable wrestlers to have on any roster anywhere in wrestling. **GRADE: A**

BOOKER T

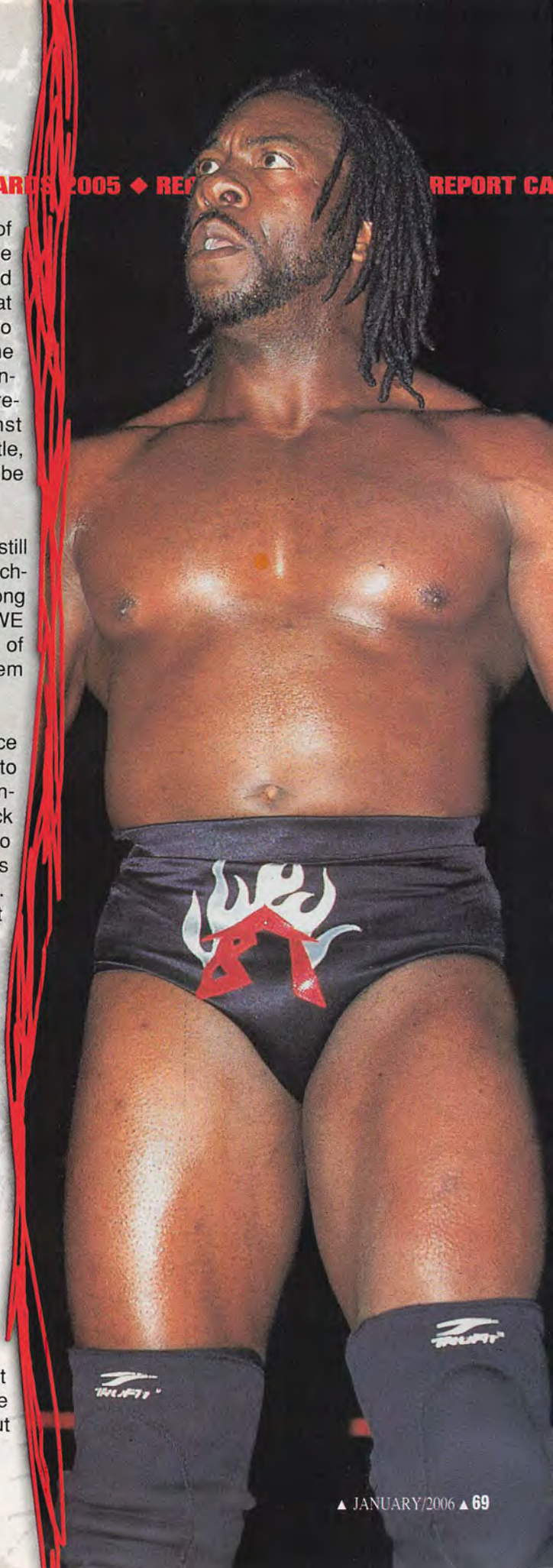
GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Booker's biggest accomplishment of the past year was getting his wife, Sharmell, involved in the action. True, he defended his wife's honor and scored some huge wins over Kurt Angle in the process, but look at where both men are today. Angle is the top contender to the WWE title, and Booker is still spinning his wheels in the Smackdown mid-card. Booker has come so close to winning a world championship on numerous occasions in recent years, including a WrestleMania XIX bout against Triple-H. Booker never managed to capture Triple-H's title, and until he gets that or the WWE title, he will probably be considered an underachiever in WWE. **GRADE: C**

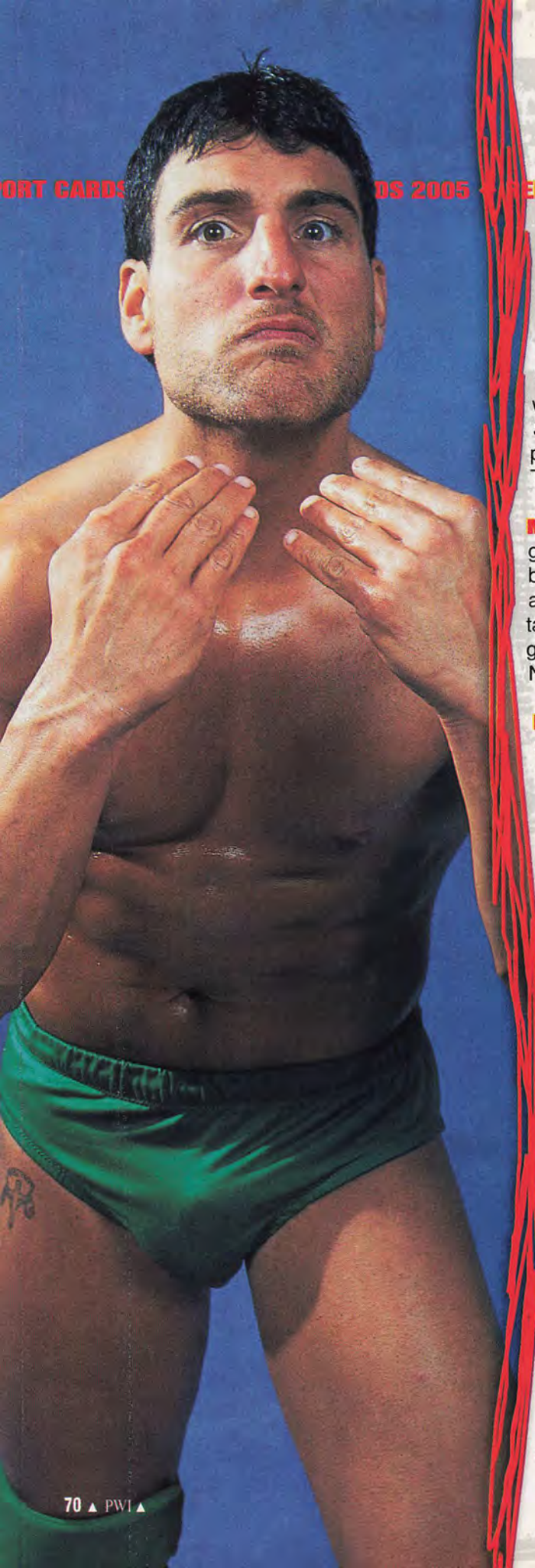
MARKETABILITY: Booker is still very entertaining. Fans still love his spinnarooni and his, "Can you dig it ... sucka?!" catchphrase, but he's been stuck at the mid-card level for so long that his charisma has worn thin. That might be why WWE Creative paired him with his comely wife, adding a touch of sex appeal to Booker, who had lost some of his Harlem Heat. **GRADE: B**

REPERTOIRE: Booker is a very good striker. He has a nice blend of power and martial arts prowess that he uses to supplement his strong fundamentals. His Book-end uranage will always be considered a pale imitation of the Rock bottom, but it is an effective finisher. Booker might want to be flashy, but he also knows that a win is a win regardless of how you earn it. You don't get extra points for style. Booker rarely makes the sort of showboating errors that plagued him earlier in his career. **GRADE: B**

CAREER GROWTH: Remember how Booker pouted when he was sent to Smackdown from Raw in the first draft lottery? Maybe he had a crystal ball. Other than his U.S. title series against John Cena, Booker's Smackdown run has been an exercise in mediocrity. That's not to say that his skills have eroded. In fact, his wins over Angle were some of the best matches of his career. But Booker went from the fast track to being stuck in neutral. Booker is like a rudderless ship that's stuck going wherever the current takes him. Not good for a five-time former WCW champion. **GRADE: C**

OVERALL VALUE: Booker T is an important part of the Smackdown roster. Whenever matchmakers need a contender to challenge for either the U.S. or World title, Booker is a go-to guy. He has become something of a placeholder—stick him into the title picture to put forth a stiff challenge until someone better comes along. That could be a good position for Booker if he could capitalize on one of those title shots. Booker is quite valuable but perennially underappreciated. **GRADE: B**





NUNZIO

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: We have to hand it to Nunzio. He is one of the most respected competitors in the WWE locker room. His peers recognize his superb mat skills and showmanship, even if a lot of fans don't. But at 5'9" and barely 200 pounds, most insiders thought Nunzio was too small to make an impact in WWE, where big men rule the roost. Well, for two months in the fall of 2005, Nunzio held on to the cruiserweight title. Even as champion, he barely got any TV time on *Smackdown* and was usually banished to *Velocity,* but he proved he was good enough to win—and hold—a WWE title. That's a huge moral victory. **GRADE: B**

MARKETABILITY: Nunzio is most marketable as part of a larger group. The Full-Blooded Italians sold plenty of T-shirts in ECW, but not so many in WWE. There's more of a chance of seeing a fan in an FBI T-shirt than a Nunzio shirt. Nunzio is an entertaining performer who is most marketable as part of a larger group. Unfortunately, WWE is doing next to nothing to push Nunzio and Big Vito. **GRADE: C**

REPERTOIRE: There's a reason Nunzio is known as "The Sicilian Shooter." He is extremely skilled at mat wrestling and submission-style grappling. Believe it or not, he's a true tough guy, capable of making guys twice his size tap out if he can hook in a key lock or guillotine choke. For such a small wrestler, he doesn't utilize the ropes as much as his fellow cruiserweights. His slower-paced, mat-based style sometimes makes people forget he's a cruiserweight, since his approach is so different than that of Rey Misterio Jr., Juventud Guerrera, and Spanky. Nunzio could stand to improve his aerial awareness and potential counters. **GRADE: B**

CAREER GROWTH: It's like a Faustian bargain: You can be cruiserweight champion, but you rarely appear on *Smackdown.* The greatest success of Nunzio's career went largely unnoticed. How many fans saw Nunzio defeat Juventud and Spanky in a three-way match to retain the title (which he did a few times in August)? How many saw him beat ROH standout Jimmy Jacobs on *Velocity,* or score wins over Paul London on house shows? Not many. He has bragging rights, but Nunzio was robbed of recognition. That hindered his career growth. **GRADE: C**

OVERALL VALUE: Nunzio is an integral part of the WWE cruiserweight division, but WWE doesn't seem to have big plans for that once-vibrant division. He did a commendable job as champion and has delivered some good, fun matches since joining WWE. But Nunzio would probably have more success—and get more publicity—as part of TNA's X division. He's a third-tier player in WWE at best. **GRADE: D**

EDDIE GUERRERO

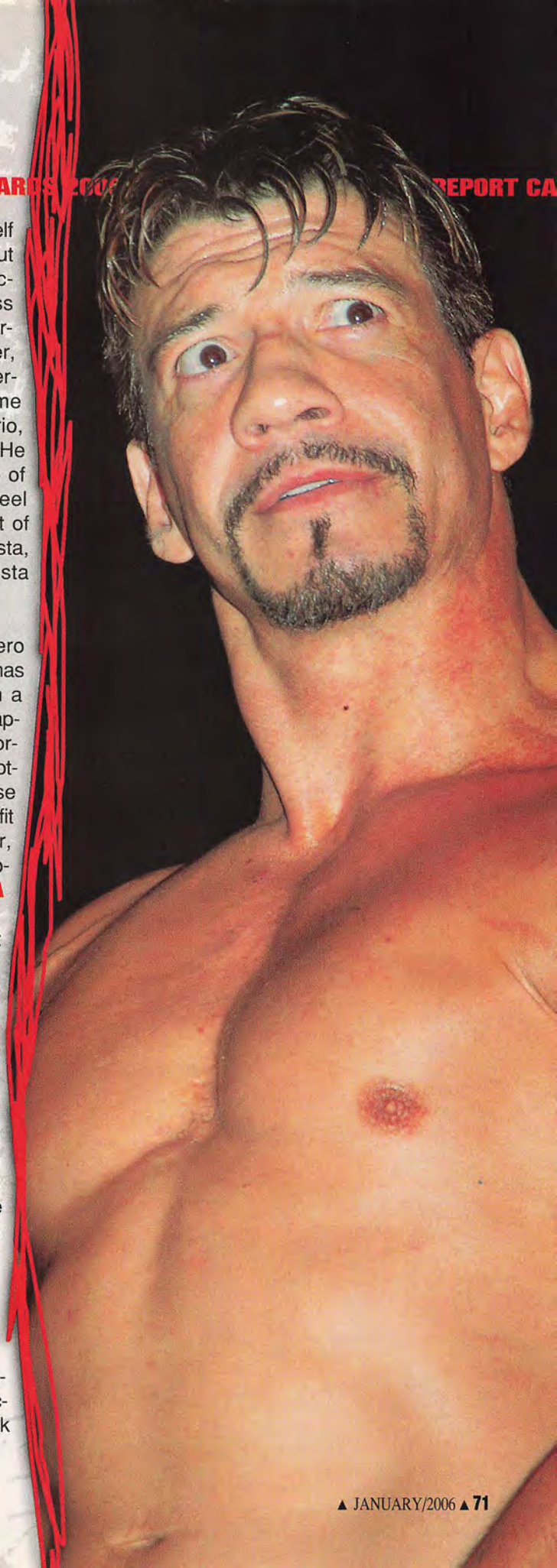
GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: "Latino Heat" has no one but himself to blame for a tough 2005. If there were a book written about him, the chapter on 2005 could be titled "Mission Unaccomplished." The former WWE champion had a win-loss record equivalent of the NFL's San Francisco 49ers, as Guerrero lost match after match to his former tag team partner, Rey Misterio Jr. As Guerrero became increasingly desperate, he attempted unsuccessfully to ruin Misterio's home life. In the middle of his failed campaign against Misterio, Guerrero took on Chris Benoit at ECW One Night Stand. He lost that one, too. At long last, he salvaged a semblance of pride by finally winning one match over Misterio, a steel cage bout on *Smackdown.* Guerrero spent the latter part of the year trying to take the World championship from Batista, by trying to befriend—then sabotage—the champ. Batista and fans saw through it from the start. **GRADE: D**

MARKETABILITY: Despite his struggles in 2005, Guerrero remains one of the best reasons to watch WWE. Guerrero has set his performance bar so high that anything less than a Match of the Year-caliber output from him is seen as a disappointment. Eddie is capable of delivering electrifying performances against heavyweights and cruiserweights and adapting with equal skill to the American, Mexican, or Japanese styles. He is also versatile in reinventing his personality to fit the situation. Sneak thief, comedian, intense competitor, angry heel, fan favorite: All of the above are accurate descriptions of Guerrero at various junctures of his career. **GRADE: A**

REPERTOIRE: You name it, Guerrero does it better than most of his peers. Aerial moves? Check. Submission holds? Yup. Suplexes? Only Benoit and Kurt Angle execute 'em better. And Guerrero takes perverse pride in the fact that he'll cheat to win if things don't go well. **GRADE: A**

CAREER GROWTH: Guerrero needs to put the Misterio feud in his rearview mirror and get his career back on track. While unseating Batista should be his ultimate goal, so far it seems like Eddie should have taken a few tune-up matches to regain his confidence and timing before going after the hulking champion. Right now it seems unlikely that Guerrero will be able to tiptoe around Batista for the belt. At the top of his game, though, he's eminently capable of taking on a much bigger and more powerful wrestler and coming away victorious. He already proved that against Brock Lesnar. **GRADE: C**

OVERALL VALUE: Unless he pulls off an upset against Batista, Guerrero might be best served by moving from Smackdown to Raw. He needs a fresh start and a change of direction. For his sake, let's hope 2006 will be a big bounce back year. **GRADE: B**



CHRISTY HEMME

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: All Christy really wanted when she originally got involved with WWE was to win the 2004 diva search. In 2005, she wanted to do a whole lot more … and she did a whole lot more. Not only did she establish herself as one of WWE's hottest divas, she worked herself into contention for the women's title during a feud with Trish Stratus and wasn't completely outclassed. She also pushed Victoria, arguably WWE's most technically capable female grappler, to the edge at Vengeance. In 2005, Hemme proved she was capable of more than being a bubbly piece of eye candy. It was the kind of rapid rise in the sport that few competitors—male or female—get to experience. **GRADE: A**

MARKETABILITY: Like it or not, a *Playboy* spread has become a measuring stick of sorts for a WWE diva's sex appeal. Hemme made her mark in the March 2005 issue. Both she and WWE ran with that ball, making Christy the face of the company at various WWE functions at home and abroad. Christy also received some publicity from an appearance on *The Howard Stern Show.* Hemme was so hot that she was sent to Smackdown to breathe some life into that brand. **GRADE: A**

REPERTOIRE: Not bad for a first-time competitor whose intended purpose was just to look good. Of course, her skills are underdeveloped, and she lacks the timing and experience to maintain a high level of proficiency in the ring. But she has been able to match her opponents' intensity and do some of the basics well. She proved she was plenty tough in 2005 by trading blows with Victoria and never backing down from Trish. Away from the ring, she was a capable hostess for the 2005 diva search as well as a slew of dance and other silly contests. **GRADE: B**

CAREER GROWTH: In 2005, Hemme went from diva search winner to hottest diva in WWE. However, Christy experienced something of a backslide late in the year. Despite her good looks and popularity, she was relegated to cheerleading duties for Eugene before being traded to Smackdown. A feud there with Melina held some intrigue. Is it a case of too much too soon, or was Christy Hemme too good for her own good in 2005? Next year, she'll have a hard time following up. But we know she'll try. **GRADE: B**

OVERALL VALUE: For better or worse, Christy Hemme's willingness to bare it all in *Playboy* and quite a bit in WWE rings drew a long look from the mainstream media—and for good reason. Whether she parlays that attention into more mainstream coverage remains to be seen. At the very least, Hemme proved to be versatile in and out of the ring. That made her a valuable addition to the WWE roster for both Raw and Smackdown. **GRADE: B**

CHRIS BENOIT

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: This was an odd year for "The Rabid Wolverine." While daring and successful (as usual) in the ring, Benoit was overshadowed by other WWE competitors for much of 2005. It's only in retrospect that you realize Benoit continued to win a lot more often than he lost—perhaps because he spent most of the year wrestling mid-card matches on *Smackdown* and pay-per-views. Case in point: Fans had barely settled in their seats by the time Benoit won the U.S. title from Orlando Jordan at SummerSlam in just 25 seconds. The victory should have propelled Benoit back into the spotlight. Instead, he's mostly been fed a diet of lesser-tier opposition like Jordan and Christian, and has consistently won with such ease that many have barely noticed. Even when faced with much tougher competition, like Eddie Guerrero at ECW One Night Stand, Benoit won in impressive fashion. So why is it that, a year removed from a World championship reign, his career seemed largely stuck in neutral? **GRADE: B**

MARKETABILITY: Benoit is the rare WWE performer who prefers to do his talking in the ring rather than on the microphone. Despite the fact that he typically competes against larger opponents, fans believe Benoit is capable of beating anyone. So he's overcome two of WWE's most central tenants for a major push—cutting colorful promos and looking larger than life. He's simply a great wrestler who will sacrifice his body to have a great match. But with the promotion's current re-emphasis on size, that's knocked Benoit back down to the mid-card level. **GRADE: B**

REPERTOIRE: Here's where Benoit really shines. Only Kurt Angle and Eddie Guerrero can match Benoit suplex for suplex, and Benoit executes not just one, but two top-caliber submission holds in the crossface and sharpshooter. Unfortunately, Benoit has also put his long-term health on the line by throwing his body around with reckless abandon. At age 38, injuries are starting to take a toll, although you'd never know it by watching him in the ring. **GRADE: A**

CAREER GROWTH: For someone who has held as many different titles as Benoit, including the World belt in WWE, winning the U.S. title isn't much to get excited about. Given his clear skill advantage over most challengers, Benoit could have retired the belt if he kept facing the same competition. To spice things up, Benoit decided to take on Jordan, Christian, and Booker T in a four-way at No Mercy. No surprise—he won. **GRADE: C**

OVERALL VALUE: Benoit remains valuable to Smackdown and WWE because he appeals to the segment of hardcore fans who care more about a wrestler's performance in the ring than about a flashy appearance and colorful interviews. **GRADE: A**

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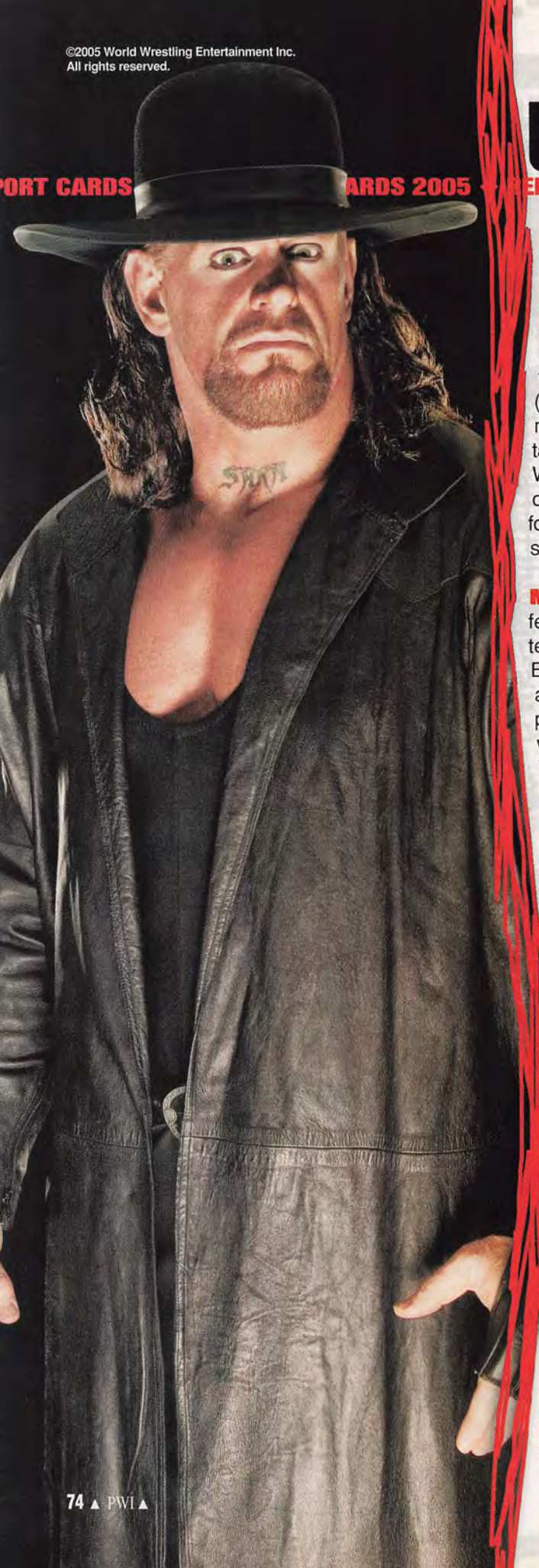


THE UNDERTAKER

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: The Undertaker's legend was cemented long before 2005. While he's no longer the most dominating figure in the sport, Undertaker continued adding to his legacy over the last year. First and foremost, "The Dead Man" preserved his unblemished WrestleMania record by conquering Randy Orton in one of WrestleMania 21's top matches. Although Orton extracted a measure of revenge at SummerSlam (with considerable help from his father), 'Taker has won the majority of their subsequent matchups. Overshadowed by the tasteless "terrorist attack" that brought a deluge of criticism on WWE is the fact that Undertaker scored a convincing victory over Muhammad Hassan at The Great American Bash just before WWE eliminated Hassan from its roster. All in all, it was a solid if unspectacular year by Undertaker's standards. **GRADE: B**

MARKETABILITY: It's abundantly clear WWE fans strongly prefer Undertaker's classic "Dead Man" persona to previous attempts to reinvent him with different looks and mannerisms. Even after all these years, the familiar "bong" of the tolling funeral bell and 'Taker's ultra-slow, funereal walk to the ring—hat pulled low to his head—never fails to captivate. Simply put, when Undertaker walks the aisle, all eyes are glued to him. That's the epitome of star power. **GRADE: A**

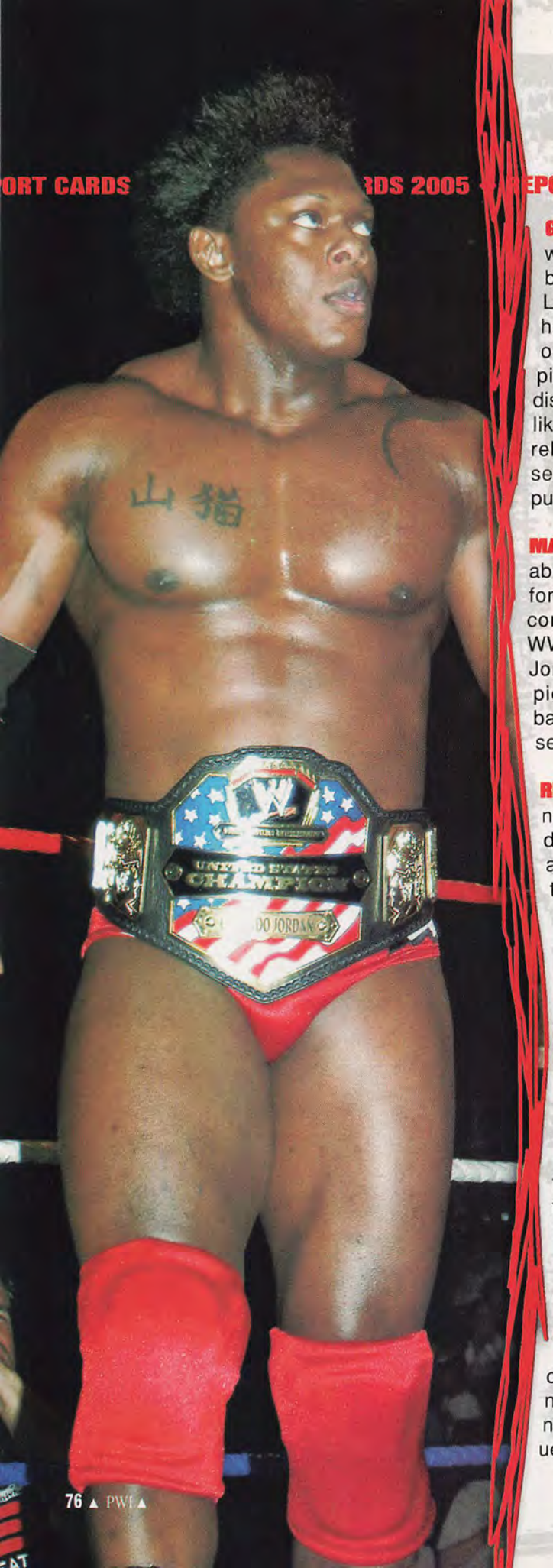
REPERTOIRE: Much like his ring entrance, fans and opponents alike know Undertaker's in-ring repertoire by heart. While age and injuries have taken away some of the big man's agility and stamina, and he doesn't seem impervious to his opponent's offense the way he once did, few survive his onslaught. To this day, Undertaker maintains a huge psychological advantage over other wrestlers because he's impossible to rattle and cuts such an imposing presence. It's still an impressive sight to see someone 'Taker's size walk across the top rope. And the inevitable result of one of his tombstone piledrivers is a three-count. That speaks volumes, considering how many "lights out" finishing moves have gone by the wayside from sheer overuse. **GRADE: B**

CAREER GROWTH: The Undertaker has stayed fairly busy, but there's not much growing his career can undergo at this point. He wasn't a huge factor in the title picture. The drive to remain a top name on the roster—and continue to keep his WrestleMania streak intact—is motivation enough for him. **GRADE: C**

OVERALL VALUE: With all the massive changes Vince McMahon's promotion has undergone since his 1990 Survivor Series debut, The Undertaker has been one constant. Let's put it this way: When 'Taker started out in WWE, Randy Orton was a 10-year-old, Sid Vicious was one of wrestling's hottest commodities, and Bret Hart was still primarily known as a tag team specialist. **GRADE: A**

THE UNDERTAKER vs. MUHAMMAD HASSAN

Photo By George Napolitano



ORLANDO JORDAN

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Orlando Jordan made a bold move when he cast his lot with John Bradshaw Layfield and became JBL's chief of staff. While he took his lumps as Layfield's flunky, he was rewarded when JBL virtually handed him the U.S. title by helping him beat John Cena on March 1. Jordan had a five-month-plus run as champion, but he relied almost entirely on interference and disqualifications to retain his title, and at times it seemed like the title was forgotten entirely. Since Chris Benoit relieved him of the gold at SummerSlam in a mere 25 seconds, Jordan has gone from unworthy champion to punch line. He is reeling badly. **GRADE: C**

MARKETABILITY: WWE hasn't done much to educate fans about Jordan. Truth be told, he is a great story—a former forest ranger who overcame a learning disability to become a star for Smackdown. But fans who only follow WWE on TV don't know any of that. All they know is that Jordan helped JBL become one of the most hated champions in WWE history, and that when Jordan has his back to the wall, he usually loses. He's a hard man to sell to the fans. **GRADE: C**

REPERTOIRE: O.J. has some formidable moves in his arsenal. There's his swinging neckbreaker, his sitdown shoulder jawbreaker, and his running powerslam, to name just a few. Jordan is a good wrestler when he has the advantage, but he's terrible at fighting from behind. Once he loses the advantage, he loses his cool and starts making glaring mistakes. If he can control the pace, he can do well, but if his opponent reverses him or finds a way to block one of his pet moves, Jordan panics. And when he panics, he usually wins up losing. **GRADE: C**

CAREER GROWTH: Jordan's stint as JBL's chief of staff was a career-making turn. Prior to joining JBL, he was mired in the lower mid-card for the most part and forgotten at times. He showed potential here and there, but he was lucky to land a televised match, let alone contend for a championship. His quick and decisive losses to Benoit represented some huge steps backward, and it'll take Jordan a long time to live them down, but at least he's still in the U.S. title picture, which he wasn't as a straight-laced fan favorite. **GRADE: B**

OVERALL VALUE: Jordan has an intriguing back story and is gradually improving his wrestling skills. One day, he could become a major player in WWE, but he's simply not there yet. He has more skills than most fans recognize, but Jordan is minor player for Smackdown. His value is minimal. **GRADE: D**

SIMON DEAN

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: We have no idea what Simon Dean's goals for 2005 were. At first we thought his primary objective was to sell his Simon System. Then we realized that we don't even know how to go about buying it if we wanted to. It's not available at wwe.com. Then we thought that he might want to win a title or two, but that doesn't seem to be on his agenda, either. We have no clue what Simon's looking to do. As of now, he's taking up space and playing the role of a 2005 version of Virgil … in a purple jumpsuit. Sorry, we can't accept annoying a lot of people as a legitimate goal. **GRADE: D**

MARKETABILITY: This is another category that Dean doesn't really work well in. How can you market him? His whole persona is that he's marketing something else. It's like trying to sell a salesman. That doesn't feel right. Maybe that's why WWE really isn't trying. Simon Dean T-shirts aren't being printed up around the clock at a factory somewhere. In fact, we have yet to see a single one. **GRADE: D**

REPERTOIRE: Now this is where we can really take a look at Dean and give him a fair assessment. The guy has wrestled all over the world, and his reputation precedes him. The former Nova of ECW and OVW showed us at times during 2005 that he does, indeed, have a wealth of experience, and why he has opponents like John Cena on his "defeated" list. His high-flying skills are complemented by his mat wrestling, a dangerous combination for any foe. If only he'd spend more time showcasing his wrestling skills than peddling his silly powder, he could make some positive headlines. **GRADE: B**

CAREER GROWTH: What career growth? Dean is a classic example of a performer who fizzled following his "coming soon" vignettes. He started off with a lot of attention, but petered out as time went on. In a world in which tomorrow's goals are all that matter and yesterday is forgotten immediately, Dean needs to focus on what he wants to do. His career grew in a big way in 2005 when he made it to WWE TV and got a lot of TV time. But it's been shrinking since. **GRADE: C**

OVERALL VALUE: Dean has value to WWE if he's used right. He can provide fans with excellent promos and matches, but he's been stuck in this one-dimensional quagmire that's been smothering him. If Vince McMahon is looking for a solid performer with strong ability, Dean can be a go-to guy. If he's looking at the Simon System-selling mid-carder, well, there's not much he can offer beyond being fodder for newcomers like Bobby Lashley. With Dean, it's all about perspective. We hope WWE's powers-that-be recognize his true potential. **GRADE: C**

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HEIDENREICH

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Who could ever have imagined the sight of Heidenreich decked out in full Road Warriors face paint alongside Road Warrior Animal? And who could have possibly predicted that team could hold the Smackdown tag team title for three months (and counting) at press time? You have to give this strange man his due. Heidenreich had been reeling ever since he lost a casket match to The Undertaker at the Royal Rumble. He was so desperate for an ally that he once brought out The Brooklyn Brawler to be his friend, and even Brawler turned against him. Considering many industry analysts figured Heidenreich would be sent packing back to OVW months ago and he's now a tag champion, he earns a high grade. **GRADE: A**

MARKETABILITY: Oh, WWE's trying to make him marketable. In fact, you'd be hard-pressed to find someone WWE Creative has worked so hard to get the fans to accept. Even with the new look—the shoulder pads and Skeletor face paint—Heidenreich still isn't winning over a lot of fans. With Animal, he gets by well enough. On his own, it might not be pretty. In fact, a lot of fans are angry at him for making a mockery of the Legion of Doom name and legacy. **GRADE: D**

REPERTOIRE: Heidenreich has some decent power moves and an effective shoulderblock, and he has learned to channel Road Warrior Hawk with his clothesline off the top rope for the doomsday device, but at this stage of his career, it's a good thing he only has to wrestle in short bursts as a tag teamer. **GRADE: C**

CAREER GROWTH: In OVW, he was a hired goon watching over Kenny Bolin. When he first showed up in WWE, he kept babbling about Little Johnny, whoever that was. Then he started writing poetry and making disturbing advances toward Michael Cole. Now he's a Smackdown tag team champion, teaming up with an honest-to-goodness legend. We don't know how he did it, but he has advanced himself. Now if only he could improve his in-ring skills and prepare to make a go of it on his own. **GRADE: B**

OVERALL VALUE: Heidenreich is an enigma. He's big and dangerous, but he's not much more skilled than a lot of the other big men WWE has signed to developmental deals. What's truly surprising isn't so much that Animal would accept Heidenreich as a partner, but that Heidenreich and Animal would actually make such a dominant team. If this new version of the LOD has any staying power and doesn't turn out to be just a gimmick designed to move more *Best Of The Road Warriors* DVDs, you have to consider Heidenreich a valuable commodity. Still, if WWE dyed Gene Snitsky's hair and put him under the grease paint, would you notice? **GRADE: B**

RANDY ORTON

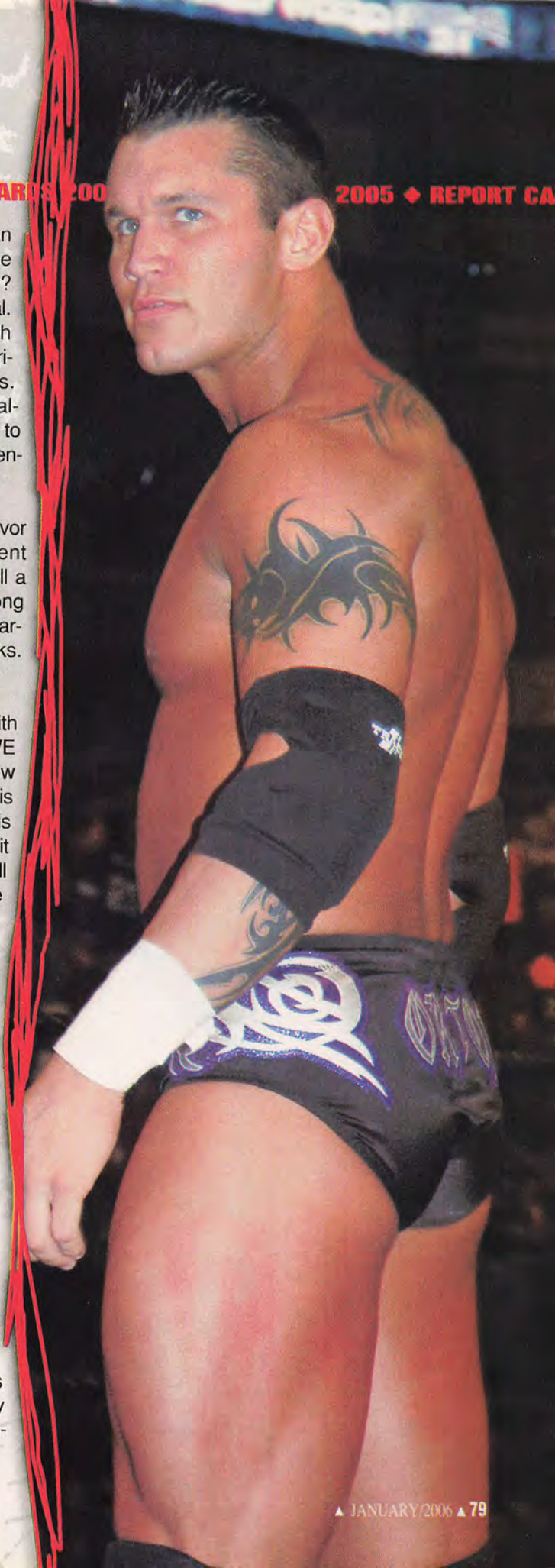
GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Remember Randy Orton? We mean the *real* Randy Orton, the brash youngster that claimed he would become the youngest world champion in WWE history? Well, that kid did great when it came to achieving that goal. This new incarnation with Smackdown? Not so special. With his dad, Bob Jr., by his side, Orton established some new priorities. Sadly, they didn't center around championships. However, if one thing can be said about him and his goal-achieving, it's that he still gets the job done. When forced to jump to the blue and silver brand of WWE, he swore he'd eventually beat The Undertaker. He did just that. **GRADE: B**

MARKETABILITY: Some may have glossed over Orton in favor of other young stars—John Cena in particular—in recent months. Make no mistake, though. "The Legend Killer" is still a marketable name. His "Parental Advisory" shirts were strong sellers. A lot of the girls hoot and holler when he makes appearances. His star is still shining bright despite a few setbacks. That's a man with marketability. **GRADE: A**

REPERTOIRE: This third-generation star was making waves with his amazing moves long before he ever stepped into a WWE ring. In fact, Orton was turning heads with his wheelbarrow suplex long ago. Now, with a lot of WWE TV time under his belt, Orton has worked to add new holds and maneuvers to his repertoire. His RKO finisher is awesome in that it can be hit from virtually anywhere at any time. We all remember how well a version of that moved served "Diamond" Dallas Page in the late-1990s. It served Orton pretty nicely in 2005. **GRADE: B**

CAREER GROWTH: It's tough to make your career grow when you miss four months with a shoulder injury, and prior to that, you lose your two biggest matches (to World champion Triple-H at the Royal Rumble and to Undertaker at WrestleMania 21). Orton began the year still trying to regain some of the momentum he lost when Triple-H beat him for the World title in September 2004. But he never caught on as a fan favorite. He regained some momentum as a heel leading up to 'Mania, then he lost to 'Taker and underwent shoulder surgery. But there was at least some talk of him challenging for the World title toward year's end. **GRADE: C**

OVERALL VALUE: A young man with solid skills who just happens to have been the youngest world champion in WWE history? That's a guy worth keeping and using prominently for years to come. Vince McMahon is counting on him to be a long-term success and will likely give him many chances to become one of his top stars. He's proven that he has the ability and desire. In a company that's always looking for dedicated performers with charisma, Randy Orton is in a good spot. **GRADE: A**



JBL

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: John Bradshaw Layfield had a terrific 2004. But 2005—that wasn't so good. Layfield lost the WWE title convincingly to John Cena at WrestleMania 21 and never came that close to recapturing it. After the draft lottery, he got to chase after the new Smackdown kingpin, World champion Batista. He failed at that, too. JBL's biggest concern in 2005 was his loss of momentum. For a guy that once made headlines weekly, Bradshaw struggled just to stay among the top contenders to the World title during the year's second half. Did he achieve *any* of his goals? **GRADE: D**

MARKETABILITY: Say what you will about his mouth and attitude, but JBL has money written all over him. Whether he's releasing a book on stocks or appearing in the newest WWE video game, fans are always interested in what he has to offer. In that sense, this former APA member has really found his niche and realized how to make a good living for himself. Layfield may not be popular, but you don't have to be popular to be marketable. **GRADE: A**

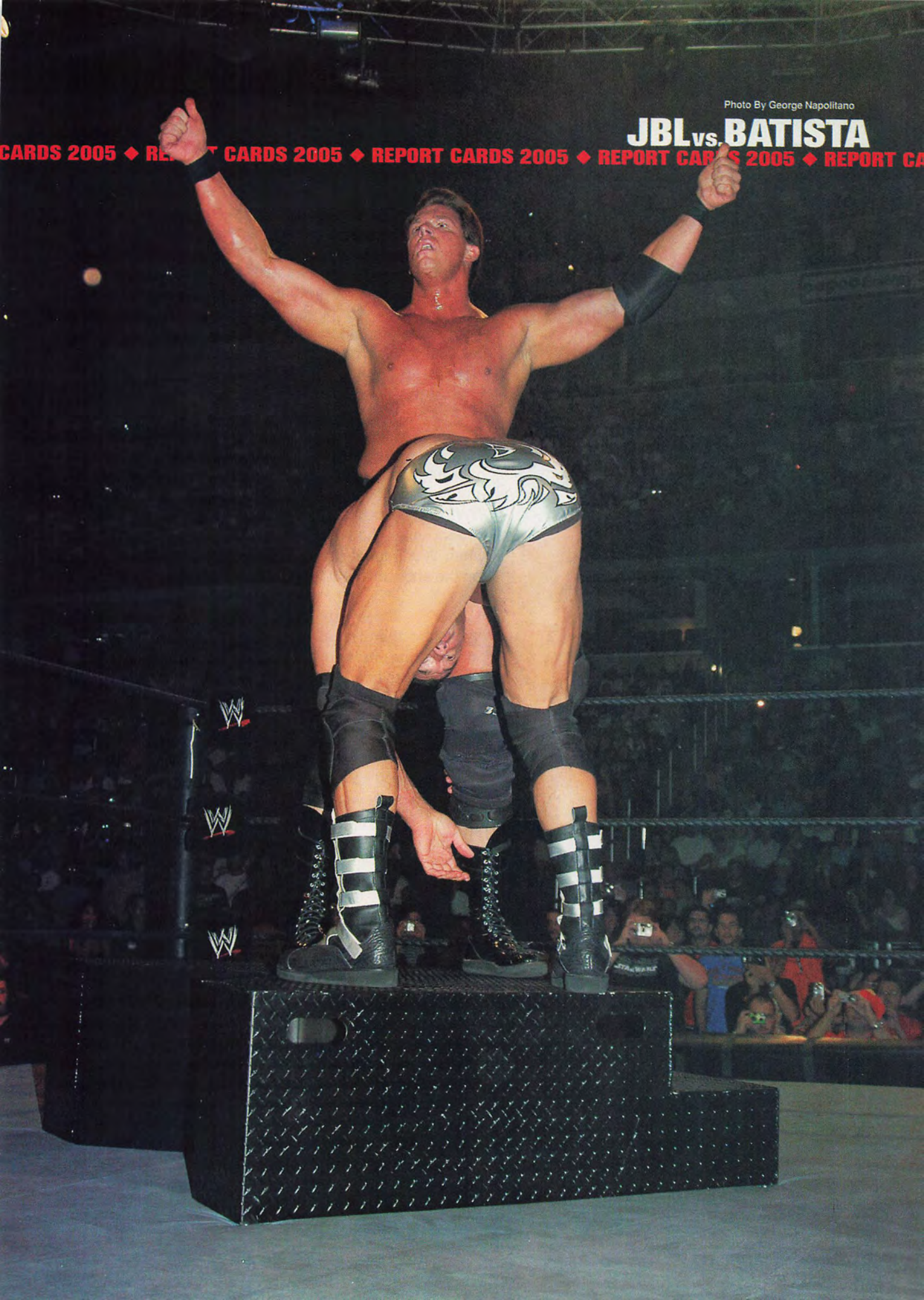
REPERTOIRE: This is JBL's weakest point. However, before you write him off as some barroom brawler, it's important to point out that he's made strides in this category since transitioning from The Acolytes. He's added more to his arsenal, but still relies heavily on brawling to win. He has an underrated ability to add the occasional new hold or move, even at this stage of his career. If he continues to make improvements like he's made in the past year, he could very well end up with a more well-rounded repertoire than anyone ever thought possible. **GRADE: B**

CAREER GROWTH: JBL's career hasn't grown much in the last year, but then again, he did enough growing in 2004 to cover a decade. The JBL story reads like a Hollywood production. Coming back from obscurity to capture the WWE title at such a late stage in his career is inspiring, even for a man with such a big mouth and horrible attitude. How much more could his career have grown anyway? **GRADE: C**

OVERALL VALUE: Plain and simple, anyone who has received the push that Layfield has gotten from WWE in the last 18 months has a lot of value. He's been pushed so much and so hard that a lot of people have complained that he's been used too prominently. It's hard to argue that point at times. Whether you agree with that or not, you almost have to agree with one thing. WWE has done whatever it can to make Layfield a legitimate superstar. He sure carries himself like one and looks like one now. **GRADE: B**

Photo By George Napolitano

JBL vs. BATISTA



WILLIAM REGAL

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: The only thing William Regal has yet to accomplish is winning a world championship. When you consider that his career has been at various times jeopardized by substance abuse problems, illnesses, and a lack of support from promoters, Regal has put together a solid career in WWE, regardless of his inability to capture a world title. On top of winning a slew of tag championships and the Intercontinental belt, Regal recently published his critically acclaimed autobiography, *Walking A Golden Mile.* Not bad for a guy a lot of people thought was washed up six years ago. **GRADE: B**

MARKETABILITY: Regal has value to the company, but he's hardly one of WWE's most marketable stars. His promos and backstage skits are always entertaining and can be counted on to retain viewership, but he's not and never will be one of WWE's showcase stars. His autobiography has been a fairly strong seller, however, and Regal always strikes a chord when WWE tours the United Kingdom, where his presence on the show draws a few additional ticket sales. **GRADE: C**

REPERTOIRE: He isn't flashy, but you won't find many better tacticians than Regal. As long as he can keep an opponent on the mat, he can hold the advantage in a match. Few competitors can match his encyclopedic knowledge of submission holds. But once an opponent slips out of Regal's grasp, Regal tends to suffer. He could stand to improve on his lateral movement and speed, and could brush up on his takedown skills. He needs to get better at cutting off opponents' rallies by taking them to the mat and then meticulously working a body part. **GRADE: B**

CAREER GROWTH: Regal probably reached his peak when he won the Intercontinental championship three years back. He has settled gracefully into the role of a support player and has guided several stars to tag team championships. Paul Birchill could be the next. Regal is entering the twilight of his career, but he can take solace in knowing he has given the sport everything he had. **GRADE: B**

OVERALL VALUE: Regal has been around the wrestling business long enough to understand his current role in WWE. He realizes he's not going to be a main-eventer at this stage of his career, and he accepts that fact. Instead of getting bitter at the wrestling gods (or WWE Creative), he seems to relish the opportunity to work with up-and-comers like Birchill and pass on some of the lessons he has learned during his career. That kind of veteran guidance and support is invaluable, and the WWE front office—and locker room—knows it. **GRADE: B**

PAUL LONDON

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Paul London had name recognition among diehard fans before he set foot in a WWE ring. Wrestling fanatics had watched his conquests in Ring of Honor and knew the transition to WWE would be tough. Since joining the company, he's captured the Smackdown tag team title and the cruiserweight title (the latter of which he held during this grading period). The biggest problem for him has been his absence from any dramatic feuds and thus his lack of time on *Smackdown*. When he debuted, London had said that he looked forward to working more in a sports entertainment-based company. So, if that was his goal, he didn't achieve it. If his only goal was to win the cruiserweight title, then he did. **GRADE: C**

MARKETABILITY: Let's not mince words. London often wears a funny vest and weird boots to the ring. The brain trust in WWE's wardrobe department must think that kids today dress like Captain Caveman, because London has been doing just that. In an industry in which marketing can be everything, London is two steps below the rest. He has no real persona. He has that vest and those boots, though. If given the chance to be himself, an undersized wrestler with a ton of ability and courage, he could probably sell more than a few T-shirts. Then again, that' s a big "if." **GRADE: C**

REPERTOIRE: London is a god among fans of good, pure wrestling. Using innovative moves and never-before-seen attacks, he has really solidified himself as someone that can get the job done no matter what position he's put in. To know his true ability, one only has to look at his string of matches with Jimmy "Akio" Yang. Buried on *Velocity,* these two still managed to make news by delivering many an amazing spectacle in 2005. Repertoire? Paul London's is huge. Too bad he doesn't get to show all of it very often. **GRADE: A**

CAREER GROWTH: While London has yet to become a major player in WWE, he went from being a second stringer to someone that can be put on any card in any position. His cruiserweight title reign helped to bring some prestige to the championship. But he really seemed to drop off again after losing the gold to Nunzio in August. Will WWE give him a chance to pull himself back up? **GRADE: C**

OVERALL VALUE: WWE could really get a lot out of London, even if the powers-that-be won't acknowledge it. In London, Vince McMahon has a young star capable of delivering a terrific match against virtually anyone, even opponents much bigger than him. Reliability should count for something. The reality is, his potential overall value is huge. But we can't grade on potential. Unfortunately, WWE just sees him as one of many cruiserweights on the roster. **GRADE: C**

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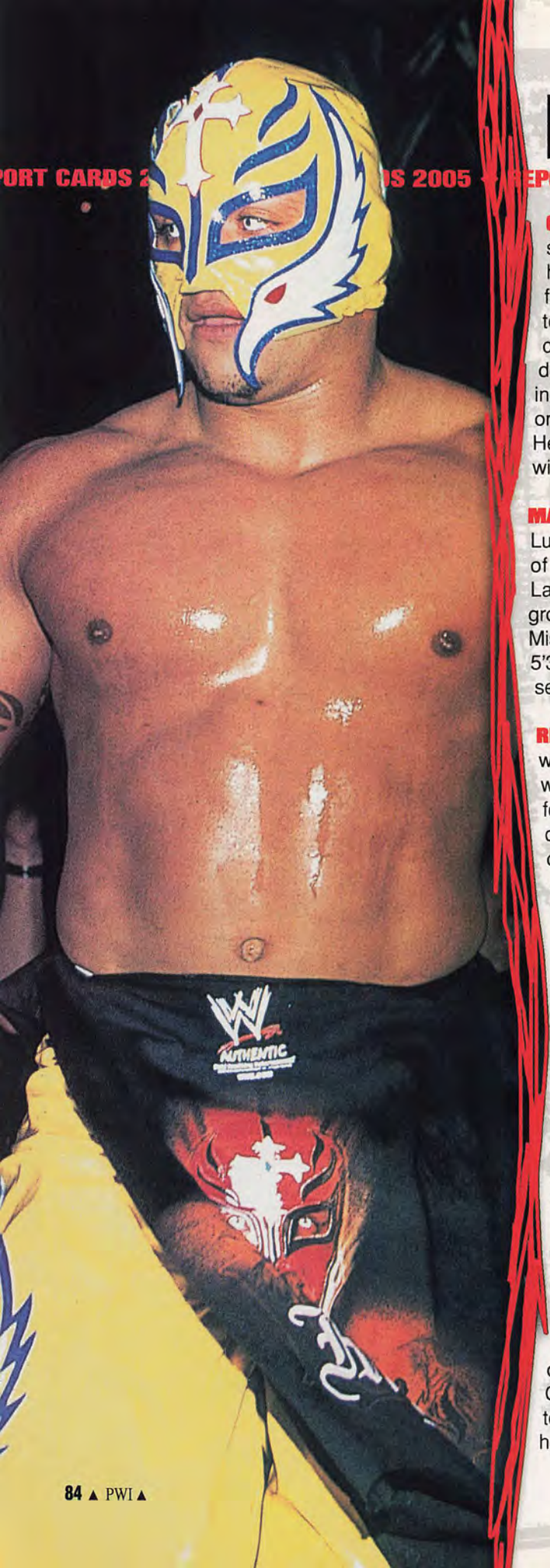

REY MISTERIO JR.

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Misterio displayed remarkable resolve during Eddie Guerrero's 2005 campaign to wreck his home life by publicly revealing that he was the biological father of Misterio's son, Dominick. Not only did Rey hold it together emotionally at a time a lesser man would have cracked, he elevated his game in the ring. Misterio's utter domination of his series of matches with Guerrero was nothing short of astounding. Although Guerrero finally salvaged one win at the end, Misterio had more than proven his point. He also saved his family life in the process and reconciled with Dominick, a victory sweeter than any title win. **GRADE: A**

MARKETABILITY: Misterio is arguably the biggest crossover Luchador star in wrestling history, with the possible exception of the legendary Mil Mascaras. Incredibly popular among Latino fans, Rey also enjoys broad appeal among all other groups. Although the WWE cruiserweight division is in disarray, Misterio continues to go strong. Despite the fact he stands only 5'3" and barely qualifies as a cruiserweight, Misterio gets himself noticed in the land of giants that is WWE. **GRADE: A**

REPERTOIRE: Rey has taken the Lucha Libre style to a whole new level. He created variations on the aerial fireworks and acrobatic takedowns Mexican wrestling is known for and adapted it to the U.S. style of pro wrestling. Some of his moves defy description. Nobody executes a huracanrana quite like Misterio—and he flawlessly executes several different variations on it. What's more, he makes his sitdown gut wrench power bomb—a move that looks nearly impossible to time properly—seem effortless. To top it off, Misterio's 619 is one of the sport's best finishers. The only downside: Although he's still just 31, Rey has been a pro for 14 years. As well-conditioned as he is, the human body can only take so much abuse before it breaks down for good. **GRADE: A**

CAREER GROWTH: We already knew Misterio was one of the most talented cruiserweights to come along in *any* era. We knew he could hold his own against anyone. But Eddie Guerrero isn't just anyone. He, too, is one of the all-time great cruiserweights and is only a little more than a year removed from a reign as WWE champion. To beat Guerrero with such regularity shows Misterio reached a new peak in 2005. Too bad he couldn't get a World title match. **GRADE: B**

OVERALL VALUE: Misterio is one of WWE's top fan favorites from either brand and a mainstay on the Smackdown roster. But after the emotionally draining feud with Guerrero, Rey was at risk of suffering a letdown. He needs to keep his focus strong and continue riding the momentum he built in 2005. **GRADE: A**

MISTERIO vs. EDDIE GUERRERO
REPORT CARDS 2005 ◆ REPORT CARDS 2005 ◆ REPORT CA
Photo By George Napolitano

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CHRISTIAN

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: The last time something with so much momentum was stopped so quickly, it was the Titanic. Sure, the sinking boat brought us a blockbuster film full of drama and a score by Celine Dion 80 years later, but Christian doesn't. "Captain Charisma" seemed to be on his way to finally accomplishing something really big with Raw in 2005. No one was sure what, but it was going to be something. After jawing with Mr. McMahon and pushing closer to the main event, the CLB was poised for a title run. Then the 2005 draft lottery came. He's been on a steady decline since. It's one thing to not climb the ladder of success. It's another to get near the top and then get shot down with a BB gun. **GRADE: C**

MARKETABILITY: Christian is marketable. There's no denying that. His T-shirts sell pretty well and even caused a stir earlier in the year when some of them had to be pulled briefly from live events for trademark reasons. With his quirky persona and arrogant attitude, this charismatic Canadian should have a world of products to sell and a bevy of fans ready to buy them. And he's a heel! **GRADE: B**

REPERTOIRE: Christian excels in this area, too. In fact, the wiry heel rarely has a hard time coming up with the right move at the right time. If anyone has a grasp on his own move set and how to use it, it's him. His unprettier worried at least a few opponents. He knows what he can do and goes out and does it. **GRADE: A**

CAREER GROWTH: How are we looking at this? Is it the first half of our grading period that matters most? If so, then Christian did wonderfully. If we're looking at the second half closely, then it's not so good. As mentioned earlier, all roads led to hell once Christian and his "Peep Show" were shipped to Smackdown. To say his career hasn't grown is an understatement. When you combine "Captain Charisma's" 2005 resume with Raw with what he accomplished with Smackdown, you get an average grade. **GRADE: C**

OVERALL VALUE: Christian has a ton of value. He's been with WWE for the better part of a decade. He has the right attitude, a high skill level, and is as dedicated to the company as anyone. Essentially, this Canadian superstar has all the goods to be a major star one day. The concern the CLB must have is that that day should have arrived by now. Just because you're a valuable asset doesn't mean the company has to recognize that. The unemployment line is full of valuable assets. **GRADE: B**

HARDCORE HOLLY

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Holly has been trying to achieve goals in WWE for more than 10 years. The former Sparky Plugg has transitioned from a NASCAR wannabe to a dangerous, hard-edged brawler. Perhaps the most impressive thing about Holly is his refusal to lay down and die. Just when you think he has finally gone the way of the forgotten veteran, he pops back up and kicks someone's tail. If you ask Hardcore what his career goals are, he'll probably tell you, "To beat up people I don't like." Hey, he does that pretty well. **GRADE: B**

MARKETABILITY: Hardcore Holly might be more marketable than you think. He has the kind of physique the McMahons love to feature on television. When you factor in the amount of time he's been on the roster, the titles he's held, and the men he's defeated, Holly has plenty to market. He has that name recognition that only comes with tenure. That's the good news. The bad news is that given all that, good luck finding any Hardcore Holly T-shirts or memorabilia available from WWE. **GRADE: C**

REPERTOIRE: When you think of Holly, you think of a rough-housing barroom brawler. After all, he has the word "Hardcore" in his name. Unless you star in adult films, that implies that you're a hard-nosed streetfighter. In his case, this isn't the entire story. Holly is also known for his impeccable fundamental ring skills. He can throw a perfect dropkick and uses the bully stigma to his advantage. Opponents who are determined to counter his toe-to-toe hardcore style rarely see his aerial attack coming. He could use a few more moves in his arsenal, but considering his goals, he's just fine. **GRADE: B**

CAREER GROWTH: Holly has gone through spurts during which most people thought his career was dead and buried. After last year's big return to face Brock Lesnar, he all but disappeared. But this year, Holly went on to form a fairly successful team with Charlie Haas. He even managed to toss Rene Dupree a beating and make a few headlines as a result. He has the first rule of wrestling down to a "T": There's no such thing as bad publicity. **GRADE: B**

OVERALL VALUE: Vince McMahon values loyalty. Holly embodies that spirit. He's been wrestling for the company since some of today's fans were in diapers. With that type of track record, resume, and tenure, he can expect to be treated with respect at all times, and he demands that. He serves as an example to younger stars of what you can do if you stick to your commitments. If nothing else counted, this would make Hardcore an extremely valuable resource. But the fact is, if he were released tomorrow, a huge void would *not* be left behind. **GRADE: C**

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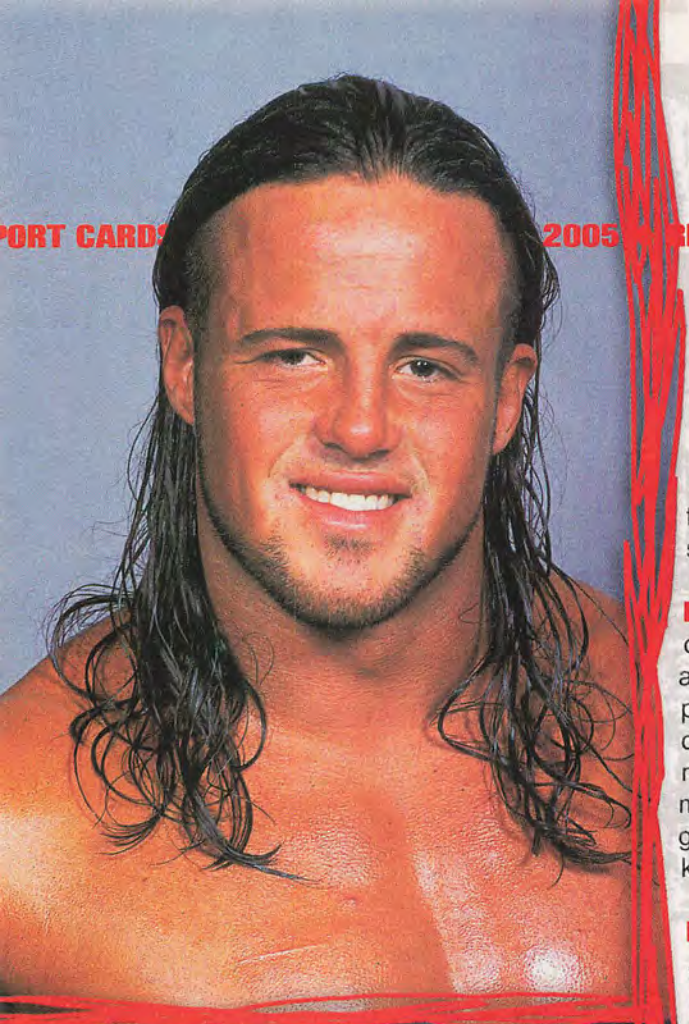


M-N-M

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: It's pretty hard to beat winning the tag team championship in your first televised Smackdown match, but that is exactly what Johnny Nitro and Joey Mercury did. That accomplishment was especially sweet for Mercury, who had previously lost a WWE developmental contract and had started with both WCW and ECW, only to see those two companies start to fall apart shortly after he arrived. Unfortunately for M-N-M, they have had more trouble than anyone expected with this strange new Legion of Doom. **GRADE: B**

MARKETABILITY: M-N-M is the most exciting young team to come around in recent memory. They have the superstar look and plenty of attitude to go with it, not to mention the heart-stopping Melina and her risque ring entrances. M-N-M should be one of Smackdown's most marketable attractions, but only if the promotion commits to rebuilding the tag team division. No matter how much charisma M-N-M have, without intriguing matches against good and varied competition, they will never achieve their full marketing potential. **GRADE: B**

REPERTOIRE: In a previous life, Joey Mercury was known as Joey Matthews, a man who had carved out a reputation as a quick-footed tag team specialist who was equally adept at competing in scramble-style matches as he was at old-fashioned, Memphis-style bouts (he previously toiled in Memphis Championship Wrestling when that was a WWE developmental territory). As a heel, Mercury has opted to tone down his aerial attacks and stick to more traditional brawling and double-teaming tactics, but he can kick things into high gear if the need arises. Nitro is still a virtual rookie, but he has learned enough big slams and suplexes—and double-team moves from Mercury—that he isn't a real weak link in the team, despite his lack of experience. **GRADE: B**

CAREER GROWTH: M-N-M stormed into WWE like a hurricane, beating Eddie Guerrero and Rey Misterio Jr. for the tag belts in their first match on *Smackdown*. They even smashed up Eddie's low rider and got away with it. They were on top of the world, until the unlikely team of Animal and Heidenreich took their title at The Great American Bash. We think M-N-M took that team far too lightly, and they have struggled ever since. **GRADE: B**

OVERALL VALUE: Again, M-N-M's value depends on whether WWE is committed to rebuilding the Smackdown tag division. If Mercury and Nitro can be matched up against some other quality teams, they could be something special. Edge and Christian, the Dudleys, and The Hardy Boyz came up with classic tag team matches for this generation. M-N-M has the potential to do the same, but not if all they have to work with is the new Legion of Doom and William Regal and Paul Birchill. **GRADE: B**

JEFF JARRETT

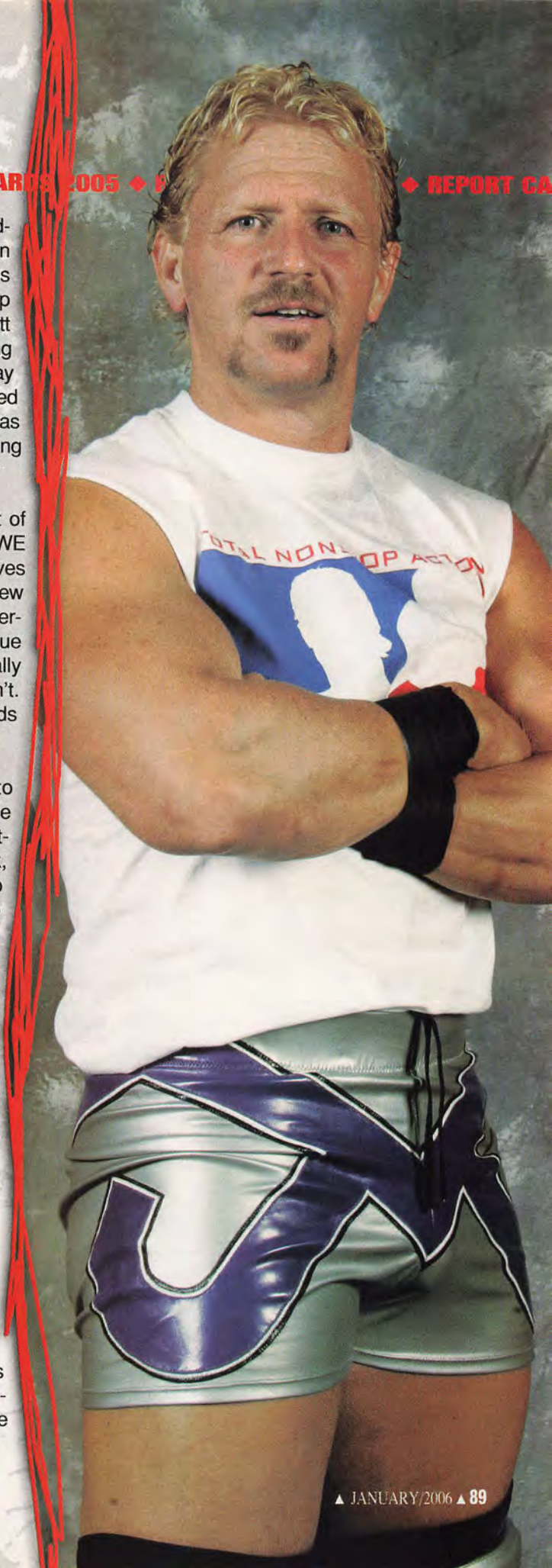
GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Jeff Jarrett lives for the NWA title. Holding the proverbial 10 pounds of gold means more to him than virtually anything else. But there's one thing Jarrett values even more than that championship, and that's being the top dog—the "King Of The Mountain," if you will—of TNA. Jarrett couldn't accept TNA debuting on Spike TV without him being the heavyweight champion. That's why he traveled all the way to Border City Wrestling and paid off America's Most Wanted to help him get his title back. At press time at least, Jarrett was back where he has spent most of the past three years, sitting atop TNA with the big belt around his waist. **GRADE: A**

MARKETABILITY: Jarrett's marketability remains a subject of intense debate. There are many within TNA who feel his WWE and WCW experience gives him name recognition and gives TNA credibility. There are others who say his act long ago grew stale, that—well—he's just too Southern for mainstream America. In fact, the Jarrett divide might be like the red state/blue state political divide—the people who believe in Jarrett really believe in him, and the people who don't just don't and won't. One question: How many Jarrett T-shirts do you see the kids wearing today? **GRADE: D**

REPERTOIRE: Jarrett relies far too much on his guitar to steal victories from the jaws of defeat, but you can't say he is lacking when it comes to ring acumen. He has underrated mat skills and tends to work over an opponent's neck, head, and back to set up for his stroke finisher. He can go toe-to-toe with anyone in wrestling, from A.J. Styles to Kevin Nash. **GRADE: B**

CAREER GROWTH: How TNA fares on Spike TV will determine where Jarrett's career is going. He has dominated the NWA title for the past three years. He has won championships in every promotion in which he has competed. Jarrett has done all he can in the ring. But can he be the man to carry TNA on his shoulders on national TV? Can his name attract ratings and PPV buys? If he is, he will finally be accepted as a top-tier competitor and not a second-rate or transitional champion. If TNA fails while he is *the* man, Jarrett will take the heat. **GRADE: B**

OVERALL VALUE: There are plenty of young TNA stars who can *become* superstars, but Jarrett is already there. As champion, he can be counted upon to deliver solid (though not spectacular) matches. In the locker room, he can be a mentor to younger talent and help elevate them. And no one can question his dedication to the company. He has put his heart and soul into TNA. But TNA cannot allow itself to become Total Nonstop Jarrett at the expense of the rest of the roster. **GRADE: A**



RAVEN

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Raven finally made good on years of boasting by "fulfilling his destiny" and winning the NWA heavyweight title. Now he stands alongside Steve Corino, Terry Funk, and Sabu as the only four men to win both the NWA and ECW heavyweight titles. Raven proved to be a fighting champion and proudly defended his championship in outside promotions, which ultimately proved to be his undoing. He had to be disappointed with losing the title just weeks before TNA debuted on Spike TV, but at least he won the championship he coveted. **GRADE: A**

MARKETABILITY: Raven likes to boast about having a genius I.Q. Maybe that's how he developed a character that has retained its popularity for a decade now. Raven built his name in the mid-1990s in ECW, and then converted more and more fans to his Flock in WCW and WWE. When record numbers of fans were watching the sport during the height of the Monday night wars, Raven was one of the edgiest competitors in the game. Even though a few years have passed, he doesn't look like he has slowed down much. He is still charismatic and still resonates with fans like few others. **GRADE: A**

REPERTOIRE: The hardcore life has taken its toll. He doesn't talk much about his various injuries, but everyone who has seen him in the locker room before and after a match will tell you that pain is a constant in his life. That's why Raven has cut some riskier moves out of his repertoire. These days, he generally sticks to the evenflow DDT and his trusty drop toehold, and softens opponents with big right hands, spinning clotheslines, and knee strikes. Those are low-risk, high-reward moves. While Raven may not have the move set of an A.J. Styles or Christopher Daniels, he rarely puts himself at risk or tries for an ill-conceived move at a critical moment. **GRADE: B**

CAREER GROWTH: Instead of, "What about Raven?" he should consider changing his tagline to, "What does Raven do now?" He finally made it to the top of TNA and ruled for most of the summer, but where does he go from here? This year, he added a new facet by transitioning from challenger to champion, but there's precious little more he can do to continue to grow. The veteran is at a crossroads. **GRADE: B**

OVERALL VALUE: Raven carried TNA through a difficult period. He won the heavyweight title just as TNA was leaving Fox Sports Net. He captured the imagination of his fans, who then stuck with the promotion during its "dark" time, watching *Impact* online and buying pay-per-views without the benefit of TV promotion. If you judge a champion by whether he can retain or draw fans, Raven's title reign was a success, and that makes him a very valuable member of the TNA roster. **GRADE: A**

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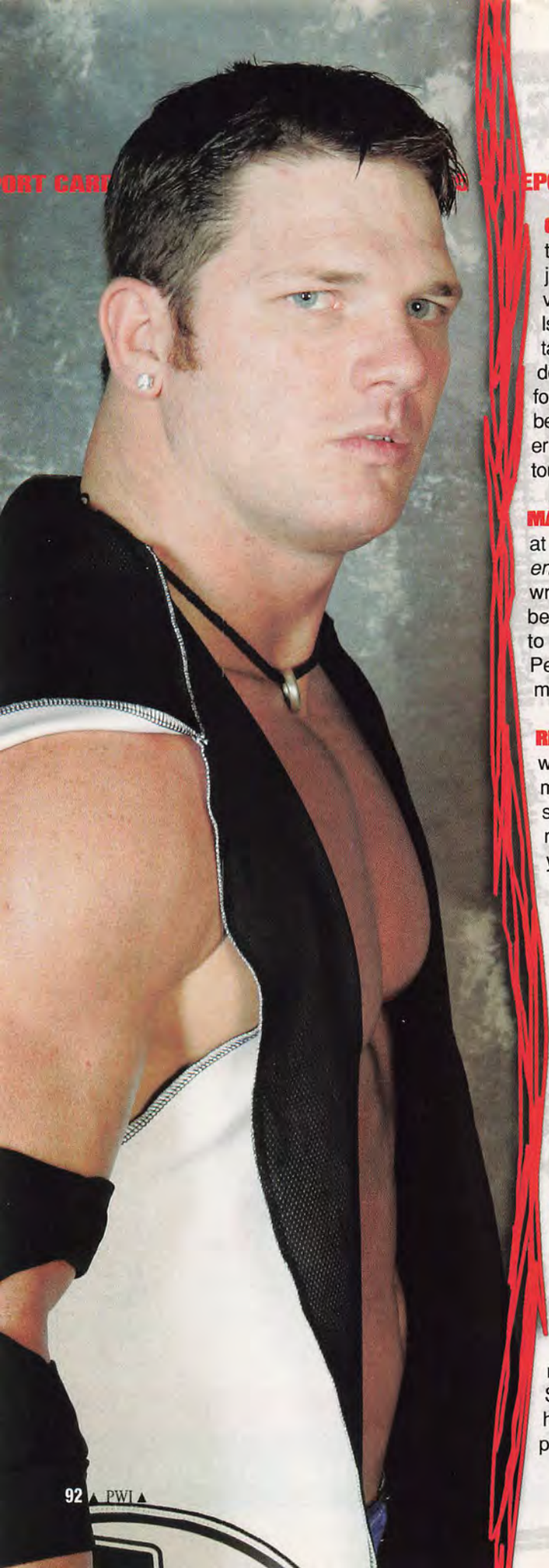


A.J. STYLES

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Chalk up another disappointing NWA title run for A.J. Styles. Styles' third reign came to an end after just one month. Instead of demanding a rematch against Raven, Styles went back to the X division and regained that title. Is the X division a comfort zone for Styles? Is he intent on establishing that championship as an equal to the NWA title? Or does he lack the confidence to compete against heavyweights for a prolonged period of time? A year ago, Styles appeared to be TNA's homegrown star waiting for his breakout. It was another very solid year for Styles, one full of fantastic matches. It's just tough to figure out what his goals are. **GRADE: B**

MARKETABILITY: How marketable is A.J. Styles? Take a peak at the merchandise section of the TNA Web site. *Phenomenal: The Best Of A.J. Styles* is the top-selling DVD. Styles wristbands and T-shirts are also hot sellers. Styles may not be the most dynamic promo man in wrestling, but he lives up to his reputation as one of the sport's most innovative stars. People pay to see what he'll do next, and that makes him marketable. **GRADE: A**

REPERTOIRE: Styles showed some, well, phenomenal, mat wrestling and technical skills during his epic series of matches against Christopher Daniels. He is also one of the sport's premier high-flyers. He is constantly coming up with new ways to turn his body into a projectile. But just when you have Styles pegged as an aerialist, he surprises you with submission or strong-style ground attacks. He has even shown surprising brawling proficiency against Raven and Abyss. He's as well-rounded a wrestler as you're likely to find. **GRADE: A**

CAREER GROWTH: Styles' career trajectory has flatlined. He keeps bouncing from the heavyweight title picture to the X division, and then gets swept aside whenever TNA brings in a new talent like Jeff Hardy, Rhino, or Kevin Nash. He has to become more assertive. He clearly has the skills to win and hold the NWA heavyweight title, but he's pretty much in the same position at the close of 2005 as he was two years ago. Sure, he's one of TNA's top stars, but we haven't seen nearly enough growth. In fact, he's getting stagnant. **GRADE: C**

OVERALL VALUE: Styles has the skills that make channel surfers take their fingers off the buttons and watch the way he flies through the air with grace and precision. He is always developing new moves and putting on four-star matches (at least), and that should continue to attract fans. So Styles is a vital ingredient in the TNA mix. In fact, it's hard to imagine a TNA PPV on which Styles isn't featured prominently—and dazzling the audience. **GRADE: A**

AMERICA'S MOST WANTED

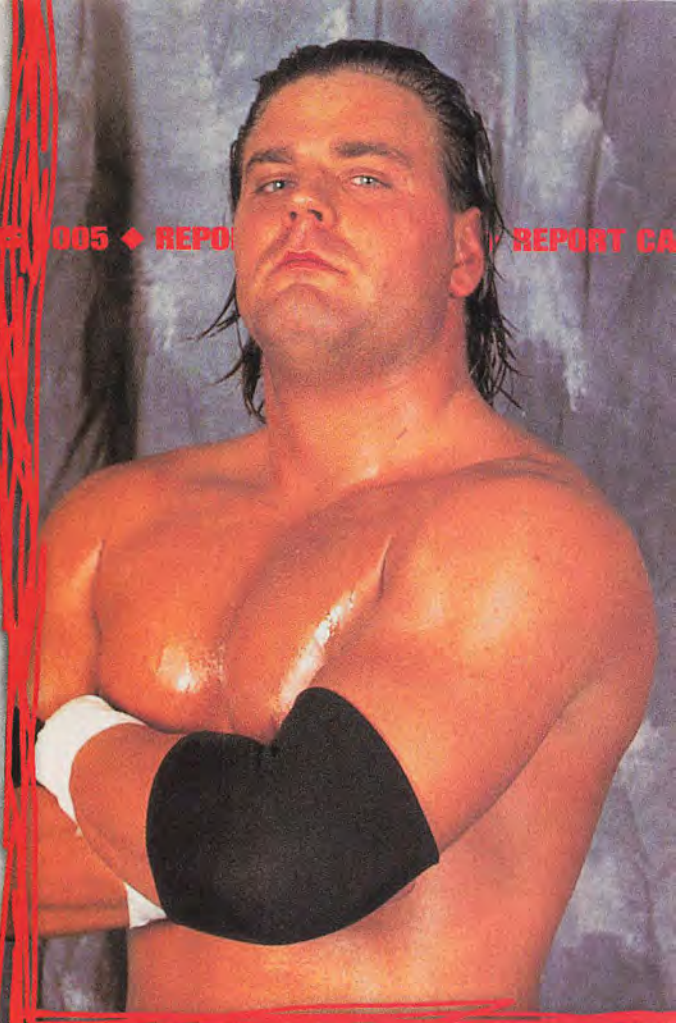
GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Chris Harris and James Storm comprise TNA's most enduring and accomplished team. They have held the NWA tag title five times and were named Tag Team of the Year for 2004 by *PWI* readers. They have done just about everything in TNA, but their true goal is to be universally recognized as the top tag team in all of wrestling. They were on the right track, especially after winning our Tag Team of the Year. But Harris and Storm have had a surprising amount of trouble with The Naturals. If AMW can't beat a young team like Andy Douglas and Chase Stevens, it's awfully hard to label them the sport's top tandem. **GRADE: B**

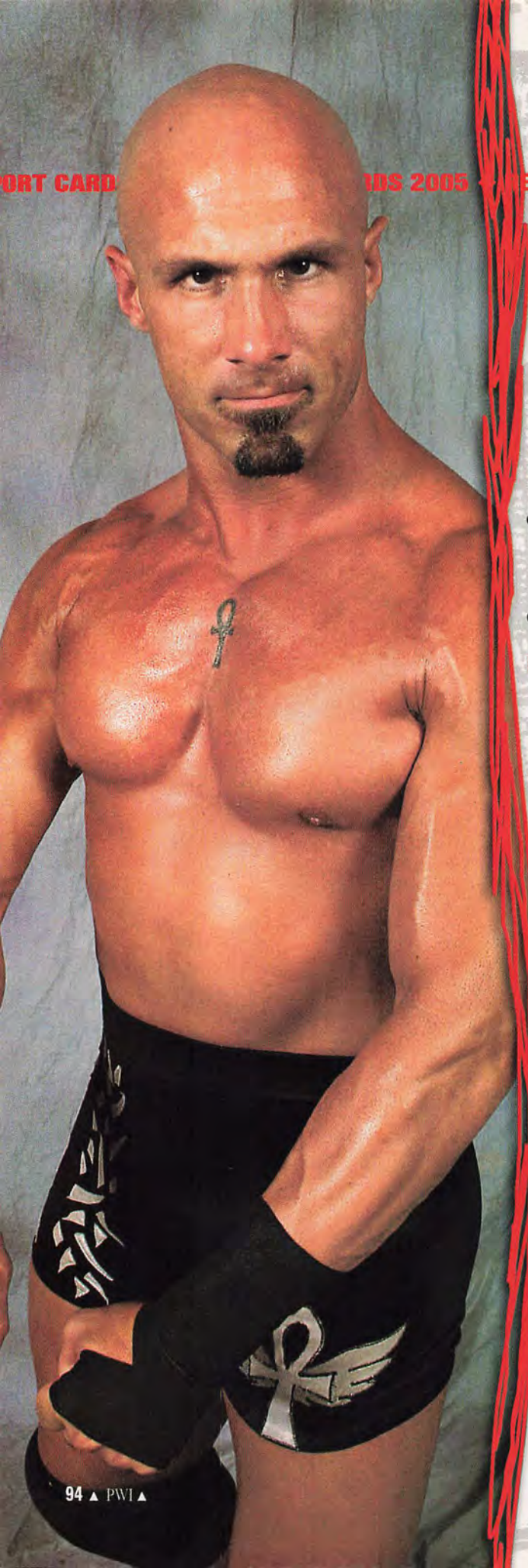
MARKETABILITY: Harris and Storm are two good-looking young men, and they are homegrown talents. But they're about as generic as two wrestlers could be. They seem devoid of personality at times, and you need personality to be marketable. Maybe their recent decision to turn heel could freshen them up a bit and give them more of an edge. They definitely need a spark in this category—a catchphrase ... a makeover ... something. **GRADE: C**

REPERTOIRE: You have to give Harris and Storm credit for appreciating the fine art of tag team wrestling. They use several double-team maneuvers, such as their versions of the death sentence, the Hart attack, and the veg-o-matic. The thing is, those moves were all used prominently by other teams first (Demolition, The Hart Foundation, and The Midnight Express, respectively). If you're going to steal, it only makes sense to steal from the best. But AMW should try to develop a more distinctive double-team finisher of their own. They have been effective with their current set of moves, but a fresh new finisher could really help them stand out. **GRADE: B**

CAREER GROWTH: A year or so ago, it was widely reported that WWE was interested in signing AMW away from TNA, but AMW has opted to stay with TNA, the organization that made them stars. No one has been able to confirm or deny that report, but the fact that so many people took that rumor seriously shows that people recognize Harris and Storm as a terrific team that could contend for tag team gold in WWE. They have come a long way from their humble roots, and their change in attitude lines them up for big matches against Team 3D and perhaps the reunited New Age Outlaws. Wins over those teams would propel AMW back into the elite tag team picture. **GRADE: ?**

OVERALL VALUE: Harris and Storm are the backbone of the TNA tag team division. They're team players and have developed a respectable fan base. Losing them would be a pretty big blow to TNA. **GRADE: A**





CHRISTOPHER DANIELS

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Daniels had an impressive six-month run as X division champion and scored great wins over the likes of A.J. Styles, Petey Williams, and Austin Aries before dropping the title in September. For most competitors, a half-year title reign is pretty impressive, but, frankly, we're holding Daniels to a higher standard. It is about time for him to start contending for the NWA heavyweight title, too. He has been in the game for 12 years now. We know how good he is. It's time for him to take that next step. **GRADE: B**

MARKETABILITY: "The Fallen Angel" has a significant following, both in TNA and on the independent circuit. His charisma is undeniable, and he is a terrific promo man. Plus, his gimmick is a classic. His merchandise and tape sales have helped keep Ring of Honor in business through the years, and his stuff is among TNA's top sellers. Few in either of those promotions are more marketable. **GRADE: A**

REPERTOIRE: Daniels' move set reads like an encyclopedia of wrestling. More importantly, Daniels knows the appropriate time to use each move and tactic. He has the rare ability to transition from high-risk attacks into cagey mat wrestling. His best moonsault ever might well be just that, and the speed with which he can take an opponent to the mat and tie him up in a Koji clutch is just incredible. He's one of the most well-rounded competitors in the sport. **GRADE: A**

CAREER GROWTH: Daniels certainly isn't lazy. He continues to add new moves to his arsenal and continues to grow as a wrestler and as a performer. While he still isn't contending for the NWA title, his stock has certainly gone up in TNA over the past two years. Things started improving when he joined Team NWA and helped that group win the World X Cup. Then he and Elix Skipper proved to be a dominant tag team, leading to this year's X division title reign. Daniels is clearly on the rise in TNA, and he earns a good mark for career growth. **GRADE: B**

OVERALL VALUE: Daniels is a remarkable wrestling talent and one of the true workhorses of TNA. His matches against Styles seem to be instant classics, and he creates interest in any storyline in which he is involved. But TNA seems hesitant to really get behind Daniels. Is it his desire to continue working a lot of indy dates? Is someone in the front office turned off by his devilish character? Or is his size and rather average physique a perceived problem? In any case, Daniels is an extremely important part of the TNA roster, even if the front office doesn't always realize it. **GRADE: A**

DANIELS vs. TRINITY

Photo by Duane Long

SAMOA JOE

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Samoa Joe has only been a part of TNA for a few months, but he's already made some big waves. He won the Super X Cup by pinning A.J. Styles at Sacrifice, and it looks like the X title will be his eventually. Prior to joining TNA, Joe had a record-setting reign as the Ring of Honor heavyweight champion and an impressive run as ROH pure champion. It's hard to imagine any goals Joe has set so far that he has failed to achieve. **GRADE: A**

MARKETABILITY: With his size and ethnic background, Joe certainly stands out. The ROH faithful see him as carrying the flag of honor in TNA, and they're going to support him every step of the way. He exudes confidence and intensity, and as long as he is allowed to continue using his stiff, strong-style tactics, Joe should continue to win over new fans. That translates into huge marketing potential. **GRADE: B**

REPERTOIRE: Underestimate Samoa Joe at your own risk. Classify him as a brawler, and he'll choke you out with a *katahajime* variation or a Dragon sleeper. Look at his physique and figure he'll fatigue early, and he'll go 60 minutes on you. He may not look like he's chiseled out of granite, but Samoa Joe is more of a total package than Lex Luger could ever be. He has the size to excel against super heavyweights and the skills to excel against X division stars. That's a lethal combination. **GRADE: A**

CAREER GROWTH: Joe has taken his act to the national stage. He has gone from the underground to the mainstream, and he's on the verge of connecting with thousands of new fans. On top of that, he's a prime title contender. Imagine where he could be a year from now. **GRADE: A**

OVERALL VALUE: With Samoa Joe, it all comes down to how TNA uses him. If matchmakers allow him to be the Joe he was (and still is) in Ring of Honor, look out. Joe is capable of wrestling Match of the Year candidates against a variety of opponents. His style and look are unique. His promos are usually realistic and engrossing. But will the top TNA stars be willing to face Joe in the kind of blisteringly stiff matches Joe favors? Is Jeff Jarrett willing to trade chops or take a series of Yakuza kicks or vicious boot scrapes in the corner? There is a possibility that some of the top stars will refuse to face Joe, which will make it hard for him to make it to the top of TNA, or that management will try to make him soften his style. If used correctly, Joe could be one of TNA's top three wrestlers. If mishandled, he's just another X guy. **GRADE: B**

CHRIS SABIN

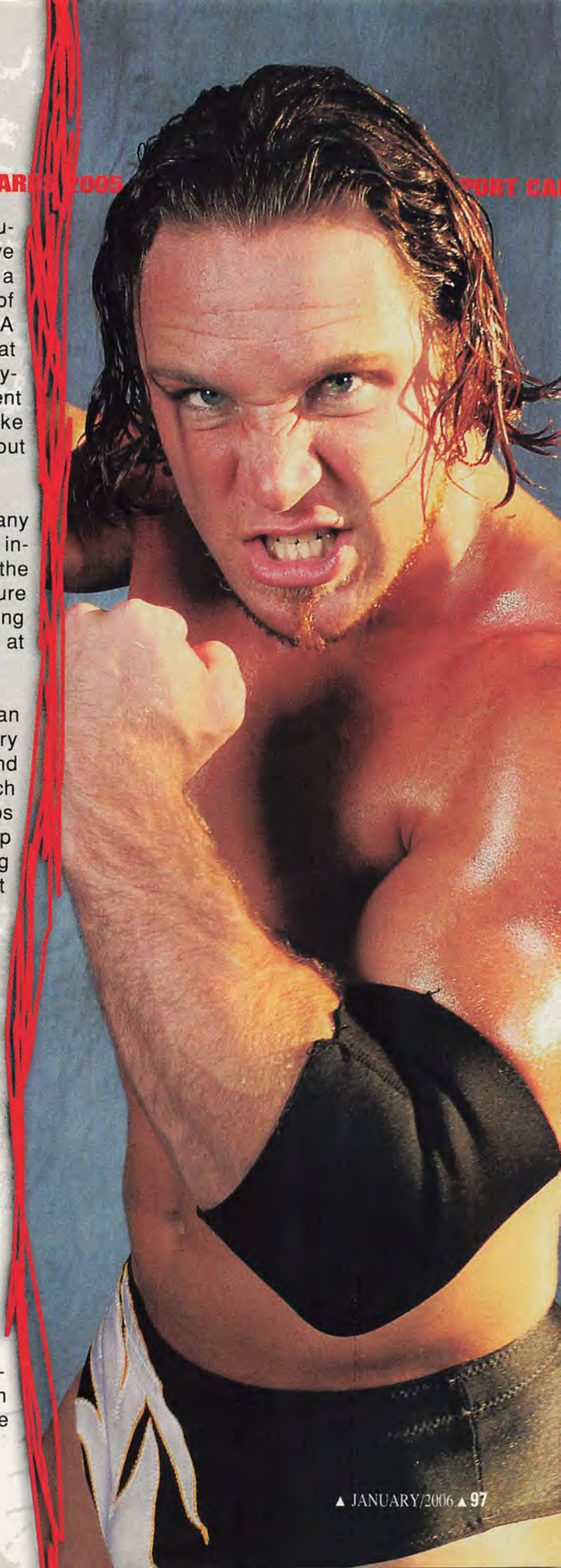
GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Chris Sabin calls himself "The Future," and that is an appropriate nickname in that we don't think we have seen the best of him yet. He is a very impressive talent and one of the cornerstones of the TNA X division. He is one of the young lions of TNA and looks like a threat to regain the X division title at any time. He might even contend for the NWA heavyweight title somewhere down the road. Sabin is a patient competitor and is progressing in a slow, workmanlike fashion. His latest falling-out with Shocker could turn out to be a great learning experience for him. **GRADE: B**

MARKETABILITY: Sabin has the same problem that many of the other younger TNA competitors have. From an in-ring standpoint, he's an elite competitor. But he lacks the personality to stand out from everyone else. His Future shock finisher is exciting, but it's one of the only exciting things about him. He needs to develop a gimmick or at least a catchphrase to become marketable. **GRADE: D**

REPERTOIRE: Like most X division talents, Sabin is an accomplished technical and chain wrestler and a very good aerialist. His uranage backbreaker is a violent and dangerous move that can change the course of a match in a moment. Sabin also has quick reflexes and keeps his eyes open for opportunities for cradles or sunset flip rollups. He is more focused on winning than on winning pretty, and that's the right mindset for him to have at this stage of his career. **GRADE: A**

CAREER GROWTH: Sabin spent much of the year 2005 feuding with Michael Shane (Matt Bentley), competing in multiple-man X division matches, and teaming with Shocker. It was a smart course of action. In mythology, Icarus foolishly flew too close to the sun and melted his man-made wings, which led to his falling back to earth. The moral of that story is that youth that tries to overreach its abilities will inevitably fail. Sabin is progressing at just the right pace. He is a student of the game and is getting better all the time. **GRADE: B**

OVERALL VALUE: Sabin may not be a main event talent in TNA yet, but we think he will be eventually. He is one of the company's stars of the future, like a hot NHL prospect racking up points in the AHL. The TNA front office has to be noticing his improvement and wondering if he could continue that growth if he began feuding with Jeff Jarrett, Raven, and/or Christopher Daniels. Most of his value lies in his future, no pun intended. Without young stars like Sabin, TNA would be in a lot of trouble. **GRADE: B**



ABYSS

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Abyss has quietly established himself as the most feared competitor in TNA. He is a perpetual contender to the NWA heavyweight title, but he lacks the focus to channel his inner rage long enough to make a sustained run at the championship. Still, Abyss doesn't lose often. He has become a sought-after talent on the independent scene as well and reportedly was heavily scouted by WWE. Not every wrestler's main goal is to win a major championship. Abyss has succeeded in becoming a world-class competitor. The titles should follow eventually. **GRADE: A**

MARKETABILITY: Don't think of Abyss as a seething mass of boiling rage. Think of him as the strong, silent type. In this era of interminable promos and constant trash-talking, Abyss simply goes into the ring and kicks tail. There's something appealing about that. Plus, a man willing to be slammed onto hundreds of thumbtacks is going to win the hearts of a lot of fans—just ask Mick Foley. Replica Abyss masks could become hot sellers. **GRADE: B**

REPERTOIRE: Abyss is a first-class power merchant. His black hole slam is virtually guaranteed to end a match, as are his sitout backbreaker and choke-slam. Sure, his arsenal consists almost entirely of the standard big man's moves, but you cannot argue with their effectiveness. We would like to see him add a submission hold or two to his arsenal just to give himself a chance to catch a breather every once in a while, but we doubt Abyss has the kind of patience it takes to work a body part. He's much happier picking people up and slamming them down as hard as he can. **GRADE: B**

CAREER GROWTH: When Abyss first arrived in TNA from Puerto Rico, we were skeptical. He was a massive physical specimen, but he came off as a weird hybrid of Mankind and the old Kane. Over the past couple of years, Abyss has shown he is *not* a cheap knockoff of WWE superstars. Abyss has scored wins over most of the TNA roster at one point or another, and now that he has Father James Mitchell in his corner, he might be able to follow Mitchell's direction long enough make a real push for the NWA title. **GRADE: B**

OVERALL VALUE: Abyss has impressed a lot of people with his abilities, his professionalism, and his general demeanor. Earlier this year, TNA announced it had parted ways with the big man, prompting rumors of his impending arrival in WWE. But Abyss surprised everyone—especially Jeff Hardy—by returning to TNA. He showed his loyalty, and that's an important quality at this critical juncture in TNA's development. **GRADE: A**

MONTY BROWN

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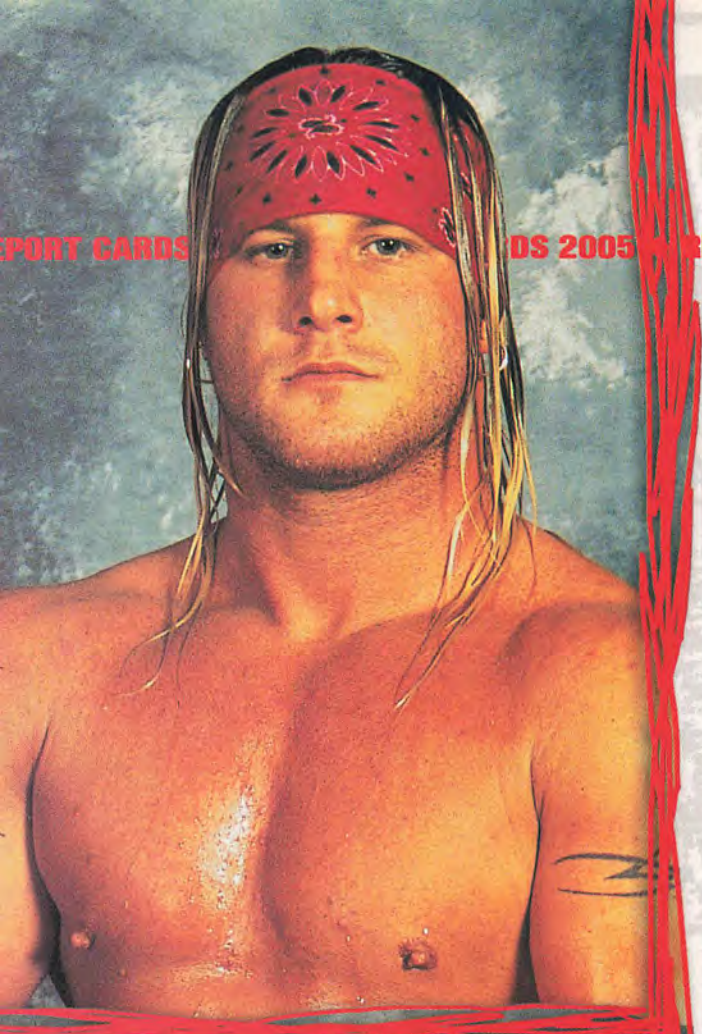


THE NATURALS

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: It wasn't all that long ago that The Naturals were considered a joke tag team. In fact, in one night in February 2004, Chris Harris beat Chase Stevens in a singles match, then beat Andy Douglas in another singles match, and then singlehandedly beat both of them in a handicap match. But Stevens and Douglas have kept improving and have blossomed into an impressive tag team. From punch line to champions, The Naturals are a rags-to-riches story. **GRADE: A**

MARKETABILITY: While The Naturals may have improved as a team, they still need to develop individual personalities. When they first started teaming in late-2003, it could be excused when fans called Stevens "the blond guy" and Douglas "the brown-haired guy." Listen carefully to the rank-and-file fans at a TNA event and you'll find some of the fans are still using the color of their hair to tell Stevens and Douglas apart. That's not good from a marketing standpoint. **GRADE: D**

REPERTOIRE: Stevens has a solid shooting star press and flying forearm, and a very impressive Ace crusher executed out of a Death Valley driver. Douglas has an impressive Natural selection finisher, and their tag team finisher, the Natural disaster, has been good enough to put away AMW and Team Canada. It's not a lot, but it has been enough to make it to the top of the NWA tag team division. **GRADE: B**

CAREER GROWTH: It is easy to see exactly when The Naturals became a respectable tag team. Their career turned around the moment they formed a bond with Chris Candido. Candido was a mentor and tremendous influence on their careers. Candido helped them win the NWA tag title, and his tragic death gave them the inspiration to raise their game to a new level. Their brief recent association with legendary manager Jimmy Hart was also a major learning experience. Last year, Americas Most Wanted were the surprise winners of *PWI's* Tag Team of the Year. This year, it could well be AMW's rivals, The Naturals. **GRADE: A**

OVERALL VALUE: Right now, The Naturals are still a feel-good story. Two young kids who dedicated their reign to the man who helped them reach the top. We hate to sound callous, but we wonder what happens when they lose the title and have to try to fight their way back to the top. Has their recent success been due—unintentionally—to Candido's death? Have Douglas and Stevens been wrestling better than their ability because Candido's death motivated them to a higher level? What happens when that motivation inevitably wears off? We're not sure if The Naturals will ever be able to make it to this level again. **GRADE: B**

KIP JAMES

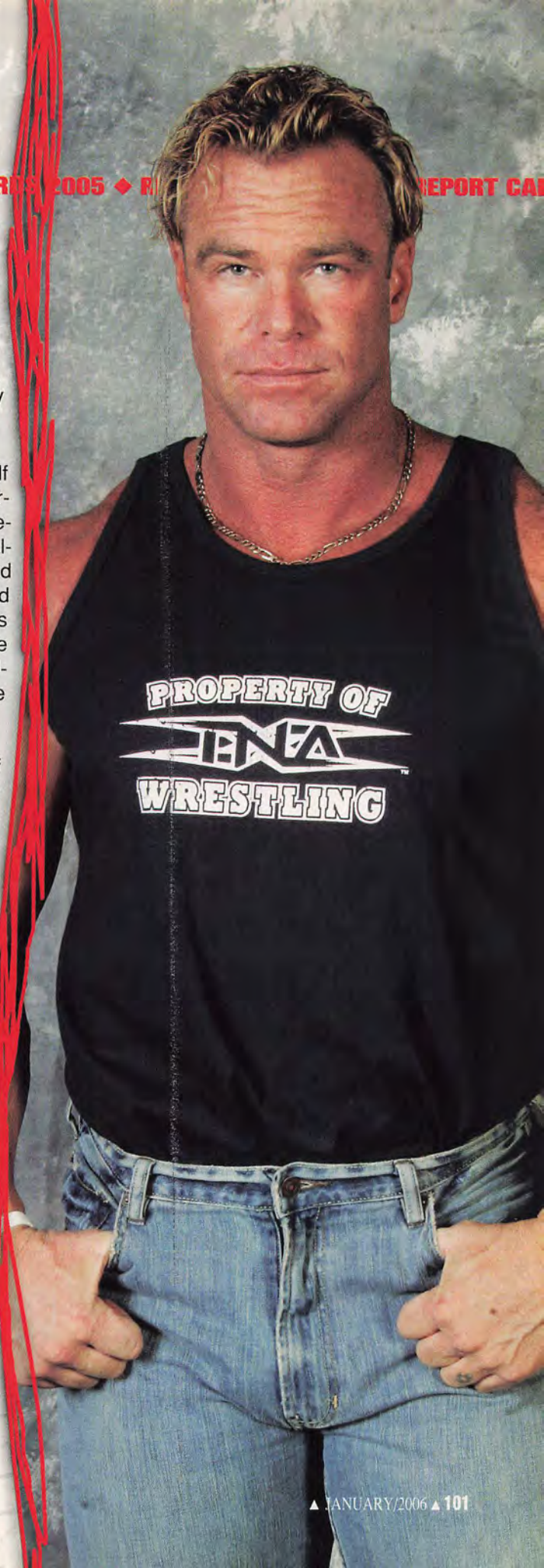
GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Kip James hasn't really made much of a mark in TNA since debuting in February. He helped Jeff Jarrett beat Kevin Nash at Against All Odds and then beat Nash in a taped-fist match at Destination X. Ever since, he has been more or less mired in a feud with 3 Live Kru. A wrestler with a resume like the former Billy Gunn's should be doing more than struggling in matches against Ron Killings. But a year ago he was being left off WWE TV and PPV events, so there has been some improvement. **GRADE: C**

MARKETABILITY: Once upon a time, Billy Gunn was one-half of The New Age Outlaws, one of the most popular, charismatic, and successful tag teams in wrestling history. Remember all those "Suck It" T-shirts? Gunn was getting royalty checks from those. But that was seven years ago, and that's a lifetime in the wrestling business. After his ill-fated union with Chuck Palumbo, his string of injuries, and TNA's nonstop efforts to remake him (The New Age Outlaw, The Outlaw, Kip James), Gunn's marketability has taken a shellacking. Of course, a New Age Outlaws reunion could change things. **GRADE: C**

REPERTOIRE: James is deceptively strong and has the sort of knowledge and experience that come from facing the biggest stars the sport has to offer. That being said, he is essentially a conservative, 1980s-style wrestler. He relies on bodyslams (including his gorilla press), suplexes, and neckbreakers to set up either his famouser or his Gunn slinger finishers. He is fundamentally strong, but seems out of place against X division stars who make him looker older than his birth certificate indicates. **GRADE: C**

CAREER GROWTH: It would have been easy for James to fade away after being released from WWE in 2004. Instead, he wasted very little time in starting with TNA and immediately getting peripherally involved in the heavyweight title picture. He has lost much of that momentum, but he has more opportunities now than he has had for the past couple of years. TNA's more relaxed schedule has given him more time to heal up nagging injuries, and James is looking better than he has in years. **GRADE: B**

OVERALL VALUE: James could be of major value to TNA in two ways: He and B.G. James could reunite and have some huge matches against Team 3D, America's Most Wanted, and The Naturals. Or he could compete as a singles wrestler and use his experience and veteran status to elevate some of TNA's younger talent. A lot of guys would love to have a win over one of the most decorated champions in WWE history on their resume. If James knows his role, he could be extremely valuable. **GRADE: B**



PETEY WILLIAMS

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Petey Williams can take some pride in being the captain of Team Canada, but that's not good enough for us. Williams has one of the most spectacular finishers in all of wrestling with his Canadian destroyer. He was a dominant X division champion and the first runner-up in *PWI's* 2004 Rookie of the Year voting. Other than winning the ECWA Super 8 Tournament in 2005, Williams failed to build on those successes. His individual talents are being obscured by his involvement with Team Canada. It's about time he considers dumping manager Scott D'Amore and going solo. **GRADE: C**

MARKETABILITY: Williams' greatest asset is his Canadian destroyer. If he didn't have that sensational flipping piledriver, he might risk being just another undersized, generic (though highly skilled) competitor. The destroyer sets him apart. Fans pay to see Williams hit that move. That's why the crowd pops when he hits it and boos him at every other moment. The move is bigger than the man, but the move is money. **GRADE: B**

REPERTOIRE: Have we mentioned the Canadian destroyer? Seriously, Williams is a fantastic talent even without that move. He is a very good counterwrestler and seems to be able to improvise new moves/holds in the middle of a match. Other than Samoa Joe, he is probably the most ground-based X division wrestler. He has top-rate scientific skills and a very nasty temperament. He's a scrapper with a mean streak. **GRADE: A**

CAREER GROWTH: As we mentioned previously, Williams really hasn't done much to build on his success of 2004. Yes, Team Canada is one of TNA's elite teams. And yes, Williams is the lynchpin of that stable. And yes, Williams has won titles all over the independent circuit, as well as the Super 8. All of that is true. What's also true is that Williams has become a mid-card player in TNA and appears to be in danger of becoming a pawn subject to D'Amore's personal whims and designs. Williams hit a bit of a sophomore slump. **GRADE: C**

OVERALL VALUE: In his current capacity, Williams could be replaced in Team Canada without much of a problem. He could leave TNA tomorrow and not cripple the promotion. That's not an appraisal of his talent, but an indictment against his management. A wrestler of Williams' caliber shouldn't be a glorified thug in a heel faction like Team Canada. He should be contending for the X title, or even the heavyweight belt. He should be terrorizing TNA with that Canadian destroyer. He needs to get more assertive and either demand that D'Amore get him back on the singles track or dump his Canadian comrades and get back to driving skulls into the mat. **GRADE: C**

WILLIAMS vs. ANDY DOUGLAS
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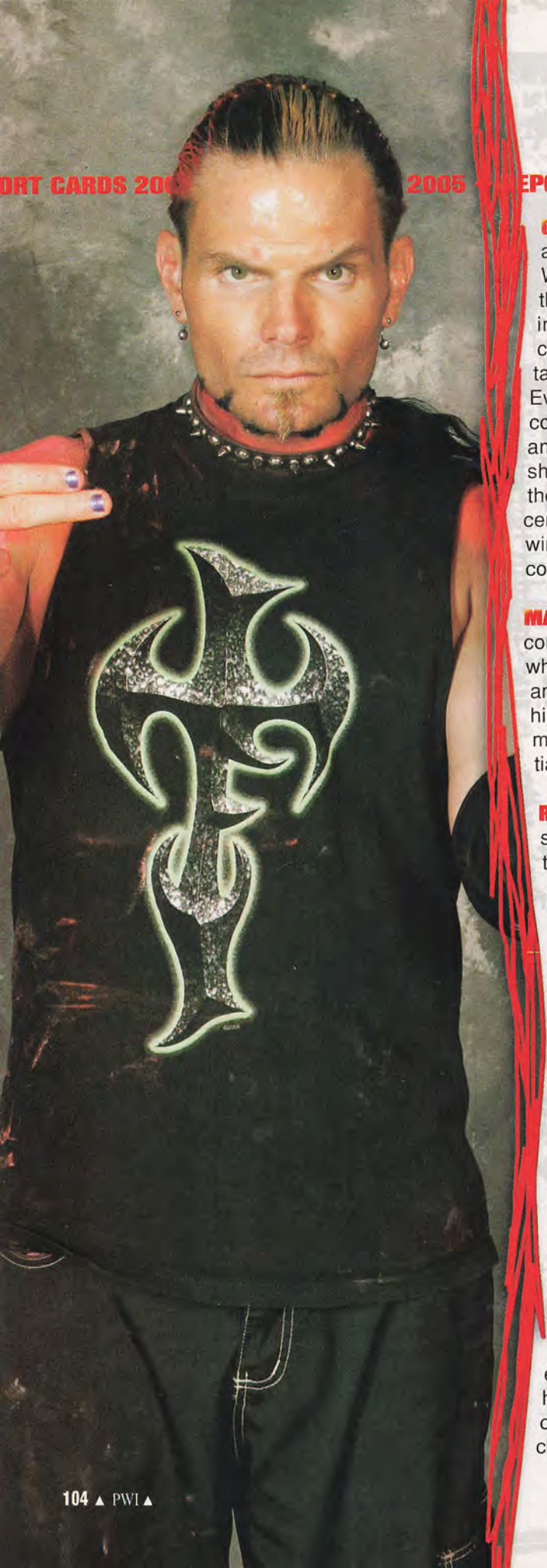
Photo By Duane Long



JEFF HARDY

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: How do *we* know if Jeff Hardy achieved any personal goals he had set for himself? We're not entirely convinced that he totally understands the concept of goals, let alone has any specific objectives in mind. The free-spirited Hardy got into wrestling because he loved to compete in the ring and loved to entertain. He left WWE because he was no longer having fun. Ever since joining TNA, Hardy has seemed to run hot and cold. He has had some great matches against A.J. Styles and Abyss, and then he's content to fade away into the shadows for weeks at a time (or just not show up at all for the occasional pay-per-view). If his goal was to earn a decent paycheck, mission accomplished. If he's serious about winning title belts, he's drifted off-course. There's just no consistency here. **GRADE: C**

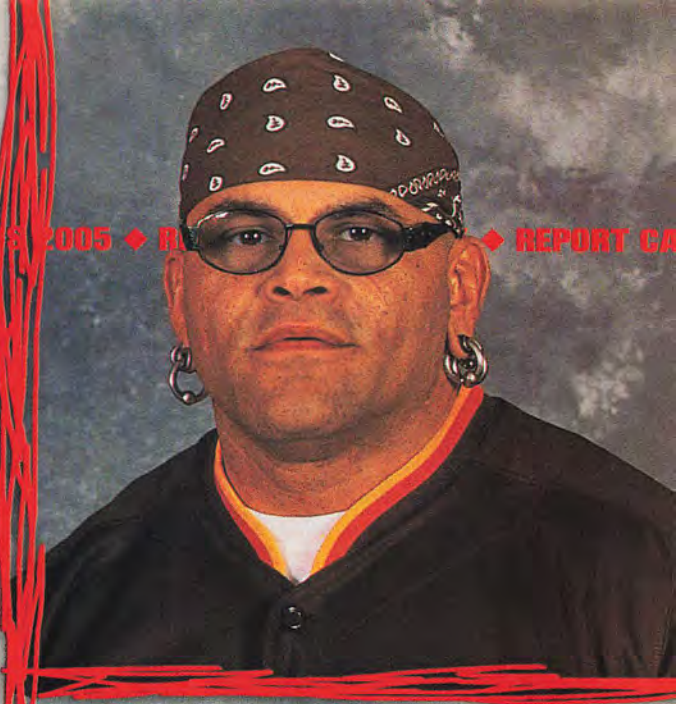
MARKETABILITY: Hardy is still an extremely marketable commodity. He still elicits squeals of delight from the ladies when he peels off one of his mesh shirts before a match, and his merchandise sells well for TNA. Some fans adore him, while some hate his guts. When you can elicit that much passion either way, there's definite marketing potential. **GRADE: A**

REPERTOIRE: Hardy has become a bit more conservative since the days he and brother Matt flung their bodies through the air with reckless abandon every night, and that's actually a good thing. Hardy's daredevil style was taking a toll on his body, particularly on his back and knees. Toning down the high-risk moves will add years to his career. His experience against a diverse array of competition in WWE prepared him for any style of opponent he faces. He can be outwrestled or overpowered, but he never seems lost regardless of what his opponent throws at him. **GRADE: B**

CAREER GROWTH: Signing with TNA gave his career a second life, but since he put his name on the contract, he has underachieved. Maybe our expectations were too high all along. Hardy no longer seems to be a serious threat to win the NWA heavyweight title, but he could certainly be a force in either the tag team or X divisions. He definitely looks better than he did during in his last days in WWE. **GRADE: C**

OVERALL VALUE: Hardy still has a lot of name recognition from his WWE days. He still attracts fans. His merchandise still sells. And when he's feeling particularly motivated, he can still deliver a heck of a match. TNA is better for having him on the roster, but losing him wouldn't kill the company, either. The fact that TNA keeps giving him chances to be an important player says a lot. **GRADE: B**

3 LIVE KRU

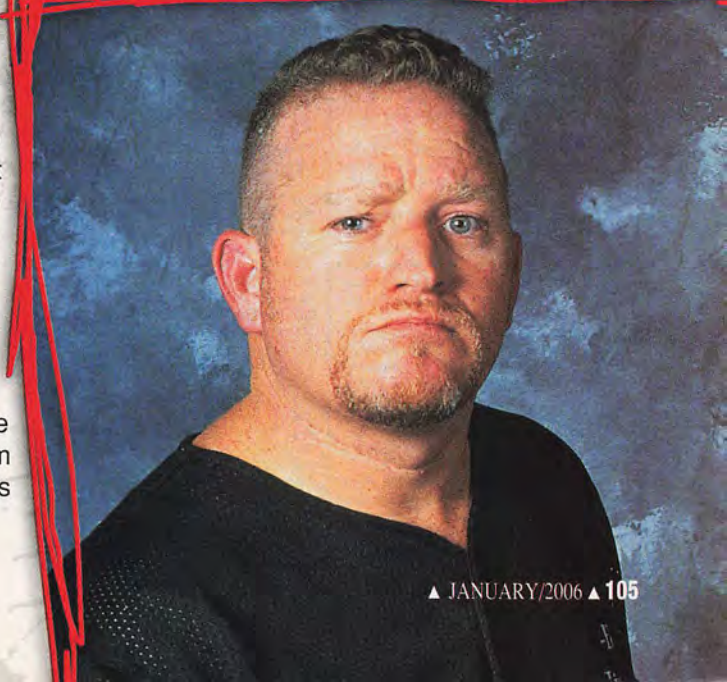


GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: B.G. James, Ron Killings, and Konnan formed 3 Live Kru because they were buddies and were looking to have a good time. For several months, the trio mainly did comedy skits and wrestled meaningless matches. They got serious in late-2004 and held the NWA tag team title briefly, but quickly dropped back down to the mid-card. They don't seem to have much motivation, and without motivation, you're not going to achieve many goals. **GRADE: C**

MARKETABILITY: The Kru has plenty of name recognition and appeals to several different demographics. Konnan is particularly popular among Hispanic fans, which is a growing segment of the wrestling audience. James and Killings are catchphrase machines and are both tremendous promo men. The unit can be extremely marketable, but that marketability is tempered by their inability to stay relevant for a prolonged stretch of time. Trash-talkers with .500 records aren't as marketable as they might like to think. **GRADE: B**

REPERTOIRE: It's hard to find a better mix of veteran leadership, international influence, and pure talent. Konnan and James may have slowed down a little bit from their 1990s primes, but Killings is still at the top of his game. Killings is the workhorse of 3 Live Kru, and for good reason. The only thing missing from their repertoire is motivation. **GRADE: B**

CAREER GROWTH: Some teams have been called greater than the sum of their parts, meaning the team is capable of more success together than each member could possibly achieve singlehandedly. 3 Live Kru is the exact opposite. Killings is a two-time former NWA heavyweight champion. Konnan is one of the most accomplished competitors in Mexican wrestling history. James is the class clown, but he is an accomplished tag team competitor. You put those three personalities together and you should expect greatness. Instead, they just seem to float around aimlessly. We hope they're having a ton of fun at least. **GRADE: D**



OVERALL VALUE: Again, this is a case in which we have to evaluate the potential value of the team against their current value. Potentially, 3 Live Kru could become one of TNA's top three or four money-earners. All three men have flirted with singing, for example. A CD release and modest concert tour could draw money and win over new fans. More attractive T-shirts (those powder blue monstrosities are just awful) would sell much better, particularly if the Kru got on a lengthy winning streak. But none of that has happened. 3 Live Kru fills out the mid-card and has done a commendable job of elevating younger talent like The Naturals and Team Canada, which is important, but still makes them not nearly as valuable as the team could be. **GRADE: C**

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June 1992: Sting: A New Champion, A New Era. Also: Hulk Hogan, Harley Race, Marcus Bagwell, Tony Atlas, IRS & DiBiase.

July 1992: Is Regaining The WWF Title An Impossible Undertaking? Also: Sherri & Shawn, Big Van Vader, Gordy & Williams, Kamala, Joe Savoldi.

Aug. 1992: The Closer Flair Gets ... The More Savage "Macho Man" Becomes. Also: Jack-Badd, Brian Christopher, LOD & Ellering, Taylor & Valentine, Dusty Wolfe.

Sept. 1992: Hulk Hogan's "Retirement": Why The WWF Will Never Let Him Rest In Peace. Also: War Games, Big Van Vader, Kamala, Marty Jannetty, U.K.

Oct. 1992: SummerSlam '92: Exclusive Preview & Analysis. Also: S. Steiner-Muta, Ron Simmons, Eddie Gilbert, Eric Embry.

Nov. 1992: The Great American Crash: Vader Crushes Sting For The WCW World Title. Also: Ric Flair, Ultimate Warrior, Madusa, Warlord & Barbarian-Bushwhackers, top rope rule.

Dec. 1992: Hey, Ric Flair: Stop Whining And Start Winning. Also: Razor Ramon, Heavenly Bodies, Jeff Jarrett, Windham & D. Rhodes, NWA title.

March 1993: Who Controls The Balance Of Power In The WWF? Also: Shawn Michaels, Nikita Koloff, Windham-Dustin, Survivor Series, Rod Price.

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Anthony, IRS, Bruise Brothers, Alundra Blayze, Freebirds.

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Feb. 1996: Wrestling's Top Stars: What 1996 Has In Store For Them! Also: Goldust, Sherri-Parker, Mikey Whipwreck, Smokin' Gunns.

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Feb. 1997: Trouble In Egoville: Is There An NWO Within The NWO? Also: Chris Candido, Bret-Shawn, Ric Flair, Joey Styles, Liger-Benoit.

June 1997: Ahmed Johnson Reveals: "I Almost Joined The Nation Of Domination." Also: Mankind, Lex Luger, NWO, Davey Boy Smith, Jerry Graham.

Oct. 1997 (Special Issue): WCW Midyear Report. Also: LOD-PG-13, Rob Van Dam, Flair & Horsemen, Ken Shamrock, McMichael-White, Madd & Mama Maxxine.

Nov. 1997: WWF War Zone: Interfederation Battles Rock The Sport! Also: Ahmed Johnson, Curt Hennig, *Nueva* World Order, Chris Candido, Dan Severn.

Dec. 1997: Losing Is Bull! Has Dennis Rodman Had It With Hulk Hogan? Also: Steve Austin, Jarrett & Debra, Harts, Funk-Francine, Chris Jericho.

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June 1998: Exclusive! Steve Austin: The 10 Men Who Inspired His Toughness. Also: Dusty & Dustin, Perry Saturn, Mortis, Jeff Jarrett.

July 1998 (Special Issue): Top Stars Answer Your Personal Questions. Also: Jericho-Misterio Jr., Steve Austin, Sunny, Scott Steiner, Christopher-Michinoku.

Aug. 1998: WrestleMania XIV: The *Real* Winners And Losers. Also: Sunny, Curt Hennig, Dan Severn, Ultimo Dragon.

Sept. 1998: Power Surge! While The NWO Fiddles ... These Men Are Burning. Also: Sable, Ultimo-Guerrero, DeGeneration X-Owen, Rocky Maivia, Mad Russian-Rambo.

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June 1999: Still In-Vince-ible! What Will It Take To Topple This Man? Also: Rey Misterio Jr., ECW, Triple-H, NWO, Blue Meanie.

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Aug. 1999: WrestleMania XV: The *Real* Winners And Losers! Also: Vam Dam-Lynn, Saturn, Goldust, Steiner-Bagwell.

Oct. 1999 (Special Issue): WCW Midyear Report. Also: Mankind & Shamrock, Snow-Holly, Sting, Edge, Flair-Robinson, AIWF.

Nov. 1999: Crash At The Bash! Enter Sid, Viciously! Also: Undertaker-Austin, Acolytes, Master P, Debra, Justin Credible.

Dec. 1999: The Rock: What Makes You Love/Hate This Man? Also: Sting, Shane Douglas, Droz, Piper-Bagwell, Taz.

Holiday 1999 (Special Issue): The 1999 Turnbuckle Turkey Awards. Also: Sting, Dogg-Gunn, Undertaker, Steve Corino, 2000 calendar.

Jan. 2000: Dreaming Of An Extreme Christmas (Tommy Dreamer & Francine). Also: Goldberg, Al Snow, Billy Gunn, Doring & Road Kill, cigar-chompers.

Feb. 2000: Wrestling's Top Stars: What's Ahead For 2000! Also: Vince-Bulldog, Mike Awesome, Sid Vicious, Gorilla Monsoon.

March 2000: Kevin Nash & Scott Hall: Getting Inside The Outsiders' Heads. Also: Dudleys, Jerry Lynn, Vince-DX, Kimberly, Zero Gravity.

April 2000 (Special Issue): The Y2K Computer Tournament. Also: Jarrett-PTB, Christopher & Taylor, Lou E. Dangerously, Lawler-Fantastico.

May 2000: Hey, Scott, Watch Your Back! The NWO Is Setting You Up! Also: Hacksaw Duggan, Rikishi Phatu, Test, Mike Awesome.

June 2000: Chris Jericho's Deadliest Enemy: His Ego! Also: Tazz, Kidman-Torrie, Nash-Funk, Buff Bagwell, New Jack.

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Aug. 2000: WrestleMania 2000: The *Real* Winners & Losers! Also: Dustin-Funk, Eddie Guerrero, ECW extreme?, WCW analysis.

Sept. 2000: Those Damn Dudleys! Is There An Evil Act Fans Won't Cheer? Also: Billy Kidman, Taka Michinoku, Yoshihiro Tajiri, Jeff Jarrett.

Oct. 2000 (Special Issue): WCW Midyear Report. Also: Kurt Angle, Malenko-Saturn, Lance Storm, Tori, Jumbo Tsuruta, ECW headliners.

Nov. 2000: When Will Triple-H Proclaim ... "I'm Sick Of Being A McMahon!" Also: Trish Stratus, Shane Douglas, Hulk Hogan, Kevin Nash, Yoshihiro Tajiri.

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Dec. 2001: The WWF-WCW Dream Matches We Really Want! Also: Tazz, Dudleys, Perry Saturn, Johnny Valentine, 100 WCW facts.

Feb. 2002: RVD: The Story You've Been Missing For 10 Years! Also: Hardys, Randy Orton, Shawn Stasiak, Turnbuckle Turkey Awards.

April 2002: Feud Alert! The Lowdown On 2002's Hotest Showdowns! Also: Rikishi, Stacy Keibler, Shane Helms, 2001 report cards.

June 2002: Special Comeback Issue: Triple-H, Chris Benoit, Kevin Nash. Also: Chris Jericho, Howard Stern, hypothetical unification showdowns.

Aug. 2002: WrestleMania X8: The *Real* Winners And Losers. Also: Hulk Hogan, Scott Steiner, Jamie Noble, Jarrett-Christopher, All-Japan.

Oct. 2002: Dark Side Be Damned! Undertaker's At His Best As Himself! Also: Ric Flair, Triple-H, Wahoo McDaniel, Goldberg, WWE-Hollywood.

Dec. 2002: The Impossible Dream, Part 2: Can Angle Win Another Olympic Gold? Also: Shane McMahon, PTC-WWE, Trish Stratus, Malice, next best things.

Feb. 2003: HBK's Miracle Comeback: Will The Fans Let Him Make The Smart Choice? Also: Edge, RVD, Chuck & Billy, Russ Haas Memorial, Turnbuckle Turkeys.

April 2003: Big Poppa Pump: On A Dirty Mission To Clean Up WWE. Also: Ron Killings, Big Show, WWE agents, report cards.

June 2003: Grabbing For Greatness: Triple-H's Desperate Quest For Immortality. Also: Abdullah, Shawn Michaels, Chris Benoit, WCW winners & losers.

Aug. 2003: WrestleMania XIX: The Supercard That Changed The Course Of History! Also: Rene Dupree, The Hurricane, Chris Jericho, Team Angle, injuries.

Oct. 2003: Done? Don't Count On It! Stone-Cold Will Die If He Can't Fight! Also: Kliq, Miss Elizabeth, D-Lo Brown, FBI, WWE nostalgia.

Dec. 2003: The 10 Most Respectable Wrestlers Who Get No Respect. Also: Dragon vs. Misterio, Hulk Hogan, Lance Storm, Sting, Lawler vs. Rhodes.

Feb. 2004: The Game vs. Da Man: The Death War That's Too Brutal To Last! Also: Undertaker, Kane-Shane, Shaniqua, Briscoes vs. Briscos, Turnbuckle Turkeys.

April 2004: The Raw vs. Smackdown Super Bowl Party: WWE Will Never Be The Same! Also: Tajiri, Maven, Carly Colon, Raw report cards.

June 2004: Who Can Tame The Beast That Is Batista? Also: Hardcore Holly, Michael Shane, Chavo-Eddie, "McSpansion's" 20th anniversary.

Aug. 2004: WrestleMania Alumni Agree: Randy Orton's Life Is Changed Forever! Also: Eddie Guerrero, Hall & Nash, Chris Benoit, insiders' poll.

Nov. 2004: John Cena: Do We Need To Hate Him To Love Him? Also: Shelton Benjamin, Steamboat-Punk, Chavo Classic, A.J. Styles, Jonathan Coachman, William Regal, OVW streetfight.

Feb. 2005: Why Randy Orton Will Succeed Where Brock Lesnar Failed. Also: JBL, Batista, Dudleys, Striker, Jeff Hardy, Turnbuckle Turkeys.

May 2005: The Return Of Brock Lesnar: Is BL The Only Man To Take Out JBL? Also: Maven, Hardcore Holly, Lita, TNA, Raw report cards.

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the business page

By Harry Burkett

The WWE-TNA war, round one. There were many questions heading into the first week of October, and it all had to do with the numbers. Would *TNA Impact* make a fair showing in its premiere as part of Spike TV's "Slammin' Saturday Night" lineup? Would it do better ratings than its predecessor, *WWE Velocity?* Would *WWE Raw's* three-hour spectacular provide the kick-start it would need on the USA Network? And would the initial splash lead to an overall greater weekly viewership for *Raw?*

As any math teacher will insist, the numbers don't lie. So here is the truth about the success and failure of TNA and WWE.

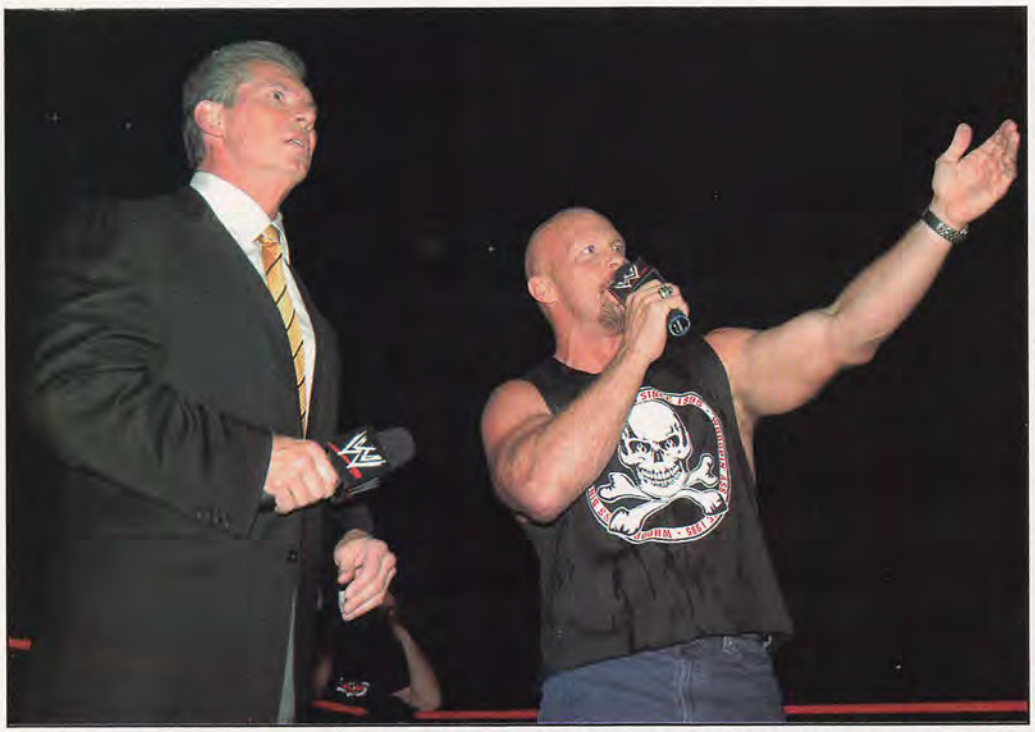
First, the October 1 edition of *Impact* failed to meet the expectations of some because it didn't reach the arbitrary goal of 1.0. Perhaps Spike TV executives had more realistic expectations, but there's no doubt the TNA hierarchy was hoping to reach that threshold. *Impact* did, however, score a respectable 0.78. But would the emphasis on A.J. Styles and the X division, seasoned with a dose of recent WWE superstars, be enough to sustain *Impact* into the following week?

The good news is that *Impact's* ratings ticked slightly upward in the following week to 0.82. That means that viewers liked what they saw on the first show and were willing to stay up again until 11 p.m. Eastern the following Saturday. Interestingly, the encore edition of *Impact's* premiere aired at midnight on the night of October 3 on Spike TV, less than an hour after the premiere of *Raw* on the USA Network ended, scoring a 0.5.

And how did *Raw,* WWE's flagship, fare in its first voyage on USA in five years? Actually, the numbers were quite good. WWE wasn't able to build toward its three-hour "Homecoming" edition very effectively on Spike TV, since the USA Network couldn't be mentioned by name until a deal was worked out with Spike TV during the last *Raw* on that network, but USA promoted it heavily throughout September. The show earned an overall rating of 4.4. The second hour was stronger than the first or third, gaining a 4.7. That hour included the segment in which Steve Austin returned to give stunners to the entire McMahon family. The segment went long, but jumped to 5.0—a number WWE hasn't seen in several years.

Despite the undeniable success of the first week, there were causes for concern. Interest in the program actually tapered off after the second hour. Of course, the ideal trend is for a program to gain momentum throughout and peak at the very end. That didn't happen in this case, and *Raw* was back down to an overall rating of 4.0 on October 10, a number slightly above what it had been earning at the end of its Spike run.

So what is the bottom line? *Raw* might have exceeded expectations slightly, while *Impact* posted a respectable number. Nevertheless, the second week indicated that interest was up slightly for *Impact* and down slight-



The never-ending Vince McMahon-Steve Austin rivalry can still be magic. The October 3 segment of *Raw* during which Austin stunned Vince (and Shane and Steph and Linda) was the highest-rated segment of that blockbuster three-hour edition of the show.

ly for *Raw.* It will be exciting to watch this play out.

It's been a real slobberknocker ... The McMahons' decision to relieve Jim Ross of his announcing duties and fire him in humiliating fashion on *Raw* is still the talk of the wrestling world. Many of the details regarding the controversial development have been covered in "Ringside," but the man himself has finally offered his opinion on the entire situation.

On the same day that "The Ross Report" was pulled from wwe.com, the company's official Web site posted an interview with good ol' J.R. following his on-air departure. "I took pride in what I did," said Ross, referring to his announcing duties. "Some weeks the shows were great, and some weeks the shows sucked. It was up to me to try and make whatever we saw a little better than it actually was ... The Osbournes are certainly closer to the Cleavers than they are to the McMahons. Someday they'll get what they deserve. I believe in karma. The good Lord has a way of evening things out."

Ross is still with the company, as his contract doesn't expire until October 2006. J.R., however, says he's already exploring opportunities in publishing, radio, football, and even politics.

JBL speaks out ... John Bradshaw Layfield has been receiving plenty of forums to express himself as of late. First, Layfield has been granted a "celebrity investor" column, along with former baseball star Lenny Dykstra, that will appear regularly on thestreet.com. He is expected to give practical investing advice, which, of course, will be full of rasslin' references and flavor.

In addition, Layfield appeared as a guest on WWE's *Byte This* Internet program. Addressing tabloid rumors that Stacy Keibler and Jennifer Aniston are fighting over the same man, JBL said, "It's ridiculous to me for Stacy Keibler that this is the way she finds publicity ... Let her have a three-way with a Martian and a guy from Pluto. I could care less—that doesn't affect me. All it does is make me look better by comparing me to people like that."

Most recently, Layfield was the guest host of the nationally syndicated *Jerry Doyle Show,* a conservative talk program. Reacting to The Ultimate Warrior's recent callous reference to former WWE superstar Darren Drosdov as "a cripple," Layfield noted, "You know, you had your little career, you had your 15 minutes in the sun, you don't get 16 minutes. Go back to your little Warrior cave or whatever you want to do. The idiot actually changed his legal name to The Warrior. It shows you how stupid this guy is. It's pathetic."

For once, a lot of fans were cheering what JBL had to say.

JBL should tell us how he *really* feels once in a while. He had some candid comments on both Stacy Keibler and The Ultimate Warrior on various shows recently.

WWE Stockwatch

(For the period of September 1 to September 30, 2005)

30-Day High: 13.80 on September 7
30-Day Low: 12.20 on September 6
52-Week High: 13.80 on September 7, 2005
52-Week Low: 9.91 on May 4, 2005

As detailed in our last issue, the report on WWE's first fiscal quarter provided a pleasant surprise: The company's profits actually rose by 47 percent for the three-month period ending July 29. While that's a substantial gain, it will take more than this quarter's good showing to turn around WWE's downhill slide over the past few years. Nevertheless, investors welcomed the news—and the value of WWE stock increased to 13.80 on September 7, when the favorable headline made the wire services.

Since the report's release, some investors have shown concern over WWE's new deal with NBC Universal, the parent company of the USA Network. NBC Universal will receive 100 percent of advertising revenue, while WWE will receive only a flat rate per year for its programming. During a conference call with investors, CEO Linda McMahon said that loss would be offset by the fact that USA will provide "deeper penetration into households," adding that the network's marketing of *Raw* will be far more aggressive than that of Spike TV in past years. McMahon also touted WWE's 24/7 service and its home video output, stating, "We have only scratched the surface on our library."

On September 15, WWE's Board of Directors declared a regular quarterly dividend of 12 cents per share on all Class A and Class B stock. The record date for the dividend was to be September 30; the payment date was scheduled for October 11.

TV breakdown

RAW (Spike TV/USA)

September 12: 3.3
September 19: 3.6
September 26: 3.2
October 3: 4.4
October 10: 4.0

Analysis: Expectedly, *Raw* dropped considerably the week after Labor Day, down to a 3.3, but by the time its last episode aired on Spike TV, the show was down even lower, to a 3.2. That had to be a concern heading into the three-hour "WWE Homecoming" on the USA Network. However, that star-studded program, which marked *Raw's* return to USA after a five-year absence and included appearances by Steve Austin, Hulk Hogan, Mick Foley, Harley Race, Dusty Rhodes, Jimmy Snuka, and several other legends, drew a very impressive 4.4. *Raw* fell back to 4.0 the following week. If it can consistently draw ratings in the low 4s, WWE will likely be happy ... for a while at least. To its credit, the USA Network has promoted *Raw* very heavily, most notably with a series of *SportsCenter*-style commercials. Overall, *Raw* remains a strong franchise, still one of the most-watched programs on cable-television.

SMACKDOWN (UPN)

September 8: 2.9
September 15: 2.3
September 22: 2.5
September 29: 2.4
October 6: 2.4

Analysis: *Smackdown* didn't enjoy nearly the splash by moving to Friday nights as *Raw* did by moving to USA. In fact, *Smackdown's* Friday night premiere, which should have drawn wrestling diehards who wanted to see at least the first program, drew a disappointing 2.9. A fundraiser for Hurricane Katrina pre-empted the first hour of the show, which inevitably led to a shaky start for *Friday Night Smackdown.* And it has been downhill ever since. *Smackdown* dropped to a 2.3 the following week and hasn't been able to recover. No matter how UPN or WWE executives try to spin it, moving to Friday nights was very harmful for *Smackdown.* Not surprisingly, the quality of *Smackdown* hasn't improved dramatically since the Friday night premiere, which featured World champion Batista's victory over John Bradshaw Layfield in a bullrope match.

VELOCITY (Spike TV)

September 10: 0.5
September 17: 0.5
September 24: 0.6

Analysis: Although the Smackdown brand's main-eventers didn't drop in to say goodbye on the final edition of *Velocity* on Spike TV, the program did end in respectable style, with Paul Birchill and William Regal defeating Scotty Too Hotty and Funaki, and Super Crazy and Psicosis beating Nunzio and Vito in the main event. What will guys like Scotty, Funaki, Nunzio, and Vito do now? And what about Steve Romero? Well, in case you haven't heard, *Velocity* lives on. But unless you live outside the U.S., you can only view it on wwe.com.

SUNDAY NIGHT HEAT (Spike TV)

September 11: 0.6
September 18: 0.6
September 25: 0.6

Analysis: At least *Sunday Night Heat* remained consistent in its final month on Spike TV, scoring only 0.6 for the final weeks. Viewers must have sensed the vultures in the sky, because these were the lowest numbers *Heat* had done in its history. It is a shame that *Heat,* which was a high-quality program when it premiered on the USA Network in 1999, had to reach such an ignoble end. For the time being, *Heat,* like *Velocity,* is still being produced for international distribution and can be seen at wwe.com.

TNA IMPACT (Spike TV)

October 1: 0.8
October 8: 0.8

Analysis: Finally, a non-WWE franchise has become a regular in our TV breakdown. Although some attention was paid to Jeff Jarrett's controversial victory over Raven to regain the NWA heavyweight title on a Border City Wrestling show in Canada, the focus of *Impact's* premiere on Spike TV was the X division. In addition to a well-produced video package on A.J. Styles, Chris Sabin defeated Alex Shelley and Petey Williams in the main event. The second week of *Impact* on Spike featured a main event that ended with Team 3D getting beaten and bloodied by Jeff Jarrett, America's Most Wanted, and friends.

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Hosted by Dan Murphy

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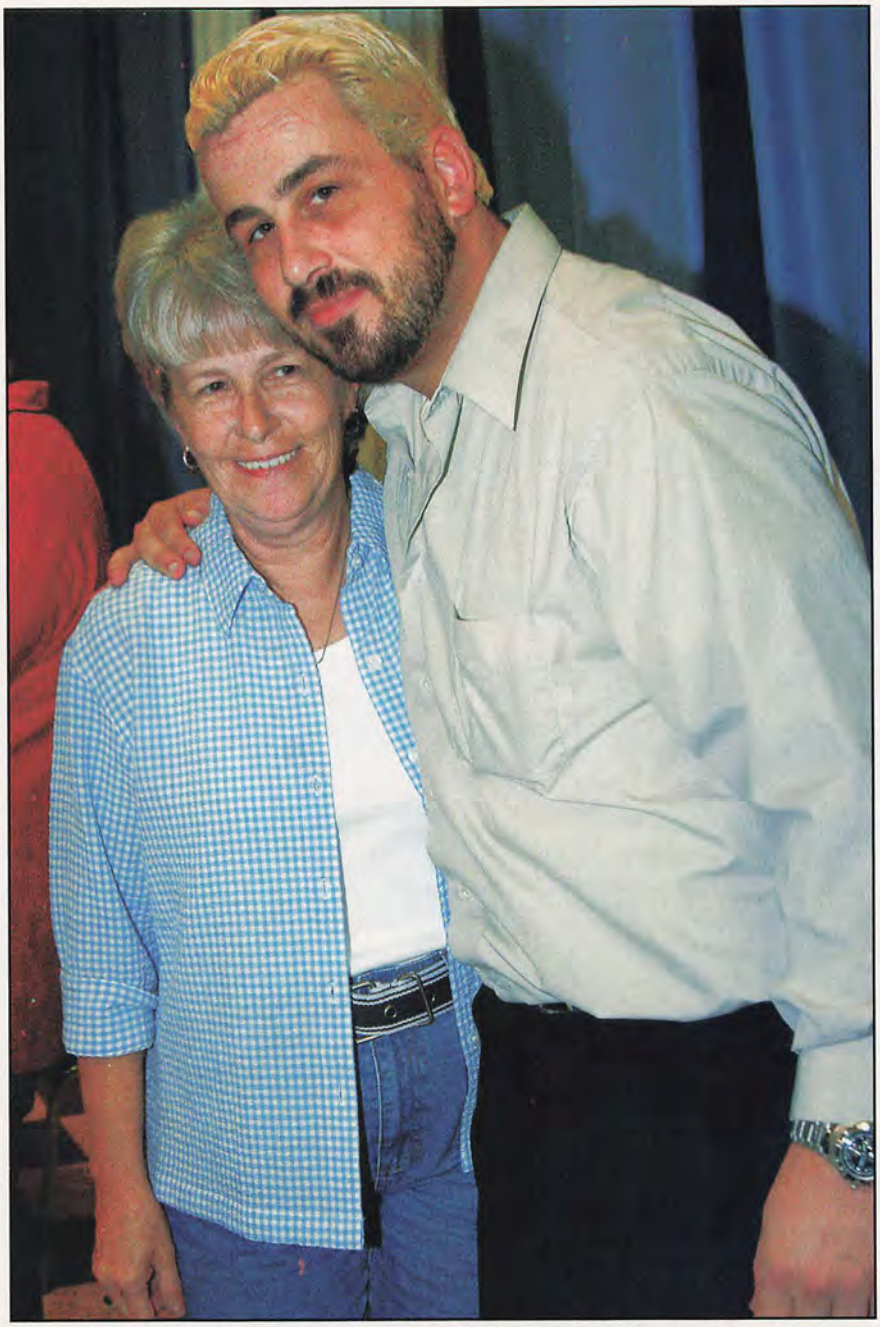
the steel cage

By Jason Langin



Steve Corino (with his mother, Marianne) enjoyed chatting with some of his heroes at WrestleReunion II. "The King Of Old School" is, however, focused on his future as AWA champion. That's right, the AWA has a future.

AS A WRESTLING fan and a wrestling journalist, I probably will never have a day as good as August 27, 2005. This was the day that I got to flash my fancy press credentials and be part of WrestleReunion II.

It truly was a spectacular event, as I had the chance to speak with and interview some of my favorite stars from the past and present. I had wonderful conversations with many of these men, including Tommy Rogers, Bobby Fulton, Jimmy Hart, Brad Armstrong, Stan Lane, Ivan Koloff, and, of course, Bruno Sammartino.

It was like stepping into the Hall of Justice for a comic book fan—wall-to-wall superheroes. And just as exciting was the wrestling event itself, with many legends and current stars putting on a great show for fans.

But WrestleReunion II was more than just a nostalgia trip. Yes, the weekend was set up to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the legendary Sammartino-Larry Zbyszko steel cage match at Shea Stadium. Yes, Greg Valentine and Tito Santana did battle for the umpteenth time. And yes, vendors were selling wrestling videos dating back to the 1950s. However, there was much more—more for the present and, more importantly, more for the future.

Many of the Q & A sessions featured *current* superstars, not legends. The Sammartino-Zbyszko storyline was actually overshadowed by the main event, a wild encounter between the former Dudley Boyz and Rhino and Matt Hardy *(see story on page 36)*. Finally, some of the vendors were not really vendors at all, but instead up-and-coming wrestling promotions trying to snag a few new fans.

(Side note: You ought to check out NWA Cyberspace. For more than a year, this organization has been putting on great shows from its home base of Wayne, New Jersey. And you know the competitors. Jeff Jarrett. Abyss. Rhino. Elix Skipper. Sonjay Dutt. Do I need to go on? I can. Jazz. Rodney Mack. The Maximos. Crowbar. Mana. Mike Kruel. Tracy

Brooks. Chris Harris. Shark Boy. I think I've made my point.)

And right in the midst of all the T-shirt-buying and picture-taking, there was a moment that brought the worlds of the past and the present together perfectly. Four-time AWA World champion Nick Bockwinkel (with classic title belt in tow) shook hands with current AWA champion Steve Corino. For Corino, it was a dream-come-true, as he got to stand shoulder-to-shoulder as an equal with one of the sport's all-time greats. For Bockwinkel, the moment was probably special, too, as the belt that he so proudly held was back in the spotlight once again after 15 years of relative obscurity.

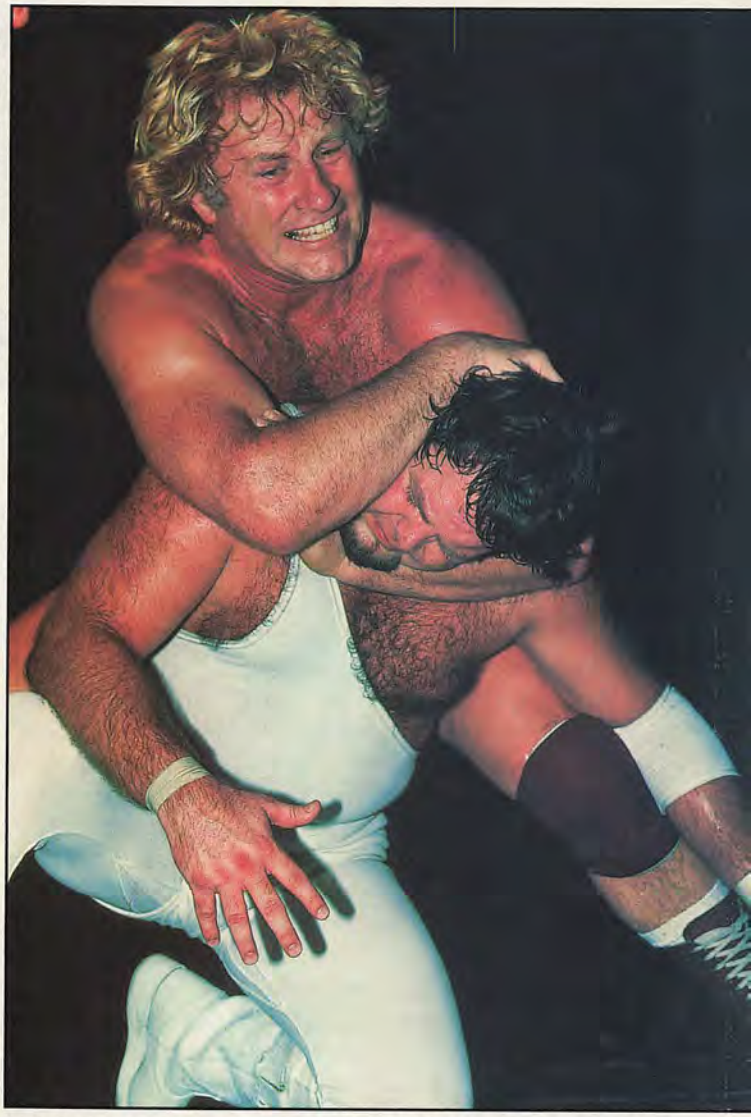
I met with Corino later to discuss the re-emergence of the AWA and how it all came about. The AWA name was purchased by promoter Dale Gagner in 1996, six years after the organization officially folded, with Larry Zbyszko as its last champion. The organization took off slowly and sported such champions as Evan Karagias, The Patriot, and King Kong Bundy.

In 2004, however, the AWA took a turn for the bigger. The AWA became a governing body of independent promotions, much like the NWA is for its more than 30 affiliates. Some of its associates include Japanese promotions World-1 and Zero-One Max, giving the AWA a real worldly feel.

Since winning the title from Takao Omori in June 2005, Corino has been a busy man. He has defended the title around the world against any challenger he can find. While proud to be the champion, Corino admits there is more stress associated with the AWA title than any other title he has held before. "Being the AWA champion is a lot of pressure because you have the pressure of living up to the great former champions like Verne Gagne, Bockwinkel, Rick Martel, Mad Dog Vachon, Jerry Lawler, and Curt Hennig, but also because you are trying to educate the fans that the AWA title is back and is to be taken seriously," he said.

History is something very important to "The King Of Old School." He may bash legends like Dusty Rhodes and Terry Funk on the microphone and in the ring on occasion, but he clearly has great respect for what they have done for the sport. In turn, Corino, a former ECW and NWA champion, is trying to carve out his own niche in history as well.

The AWA did, indeed, have a tremendous history. Before "Hulkamania" ran wild in Madison Square Garden, it was running wild in the AWA. Before The Road Warriors became the world's most dominant tag team, they were destroying teams in the AWA. Before Jerry Lawler was making goo-goo eyes at WWE divas, he was fighting honorably as AWA champion. From Pat O'Connor to Zbyszko, the AWA thrilled fans for 30 years. It even had its own featured program on ESPN back in the 1980s.



With Corino as champion, the AWA is enjoying something of a resurgence, both in the U.S. and Japan, but it has a long way to go before it reaches the status it enjoyed during the glory days of Nick Bockwinkel and Jerry Lawler.

Corino knows, however, that many fans are ignorant of this history, but doesn't blame them for their lack of knowledge. "WWE has pretty much told fans that if it didn't happen in the WWWF/WWF/WWE or they don't own the history of it, it never happened," he told me.

The video vault of the original AWA *was* purchased by WWE. You can even see some of the organization's classic matches on WWE DVD releases and on the wwe.com Match Jukebox (there are four AWA matches currently available in the 1980s section).

Corino is realistic when he talks about building off the rich history of the promotion. "The AWA has a great legacy, but we cannot live off the legacy. We need to build a new one. And it is going to take time. There is going to be a lot of trial and error in the new AWA."

The AWA truly has a lot of work to do if it is to merely survive. But if the organization can feed off the determination of its 32-year-old champion, it just might find a way not just to survive, but to start to thrive. □

win, lose, or draw

By Harry Burkett

"DROP THE BELT! Drop the belt!" is becoming a familiar chant that is reverberating throughout Universal Studios in Orlando whenever NWA champion Jeff Jarrett enters the ring. Now those chants wouldn't be so loud if Jarrett defended the belt more often in straight one-on-one matches, but to TNA fans, the self-proclaimed "King Of The Mountain" does too much talking, wrestles in too many tag team and six-man tag team bouts, and, when he does put the gold on the line, his title defenses are marred by ridiculous amounts of interference and foreign objects.

Like I've written before, Jarrett has more broken guitars than a Nashville pawn shop. Prior to Jarrett's title defense against Kevin Nash in February, Director of Authority Dusty Rhodes decreed that Jarrett would lose the NWA heavyweight title if he dared to use a guitar as a weapon. And how did Jarrett get around that stipulation? He pulled an even bigger weapon out of the string family, a fat ol' cello, and bashed Nash with it. Then he repeatedly slammed Nash's knees with the lid of the cello case!

In wrestling, insiders say that heels have either "good heat" or "bad heat." Hollywood Hogan, Ric Flair, The Rock, and even Vince McMahon used to draw "good heat," meaning that fans loved to hate them—and would be happy to pay their hard-earned dollars to see someone kick their butts. Henry Godwinn, Vince Russo, David Flair, and David Arquette often drew "bad heat," meaning that fans booed them because they genuinely hated them and wouldn't pay a dime to see them under any circumstances. Triple-H has walked the fine line between bad heat and good heat at times, earning resentment for his marriage to Stephanie McMahon and his obsession with controlling the Raw brand, yet Helmsley is able to offset that bad heat with good heat by turning in great performances in pay-per-view main events on a consistent basis.

Those chants at Universal Studios are bad heat. During one set of *Impact* tapings earlier this year, fans actually began chanting at Jarrett, "Get your hat, get your coat, and leave!" Jarrett has either tried to ignore the chants or play them up, depending on his mood. Nevertheless, the fans' message had to be loud and clear to the TNA hierarchy that extends beyond Jarrett. Most recently, fans started chanting, "Drop the belt!" and Jarrett actually fumbled the NWA belt onto the mat for them, stoking the fire even more.

That's the correct way for Jarrett to handle the situation. He should confront the issue head-on, acknowledge what the fans are saying, and try to turn the bad heat into good heat.

How does he go about doing that? Of course, fans might be happy if Jarrett dropped the belt permanently to A.J. Styles, Monty Brown, or even Petey Williams. But that would end the viability of Jarrett's character when he still has the potential to be a main event draw. How does Jarrett get rid of the bad heat, but stay within the main event mix?

Let's examine the situation. Why does Jarrett have bad heat in the first place? It's common knowledge that his father, Jerry Jarrett, gave him his start in the wrestling business and helped launch TNA with the idea of

This picture probably sickens a lot of the fans that attend *TNA Impact* tapings in Orlando—and probably a fair number of other TNA fans. They just can't accept Jeff Jarrett as NWA champion. Harry Burkett thinks there's a way for him to make fans hate him in a more positive way.

making Jeff thea star. Furthermore, Jeff insists on remaining the NWA champion, with four reigns over the past three years, although it is obvious that many wrestlers in the X division—including Styles, Williams, Chris Sabin, and Samoa Joe—are far better athletes and potentially better draws.

Then there are his matches. They are *soooooo* 1999. The brawling on the outside, the constant interference of his running buddies (now America's Most Wanted, among others), and countless run-ins capped by a screw job finish are straight out of the Monday night war textbook. Jarrett's personal wrestling style isn't much more compelling. How many times have we seen Jarrett lay atop the corner turnbuckles with his legs crossed, yawning as his opponent struggles to recover? What about the two-fingered "Nature Boy" strut? Or how about the stroke, one of the most anticlimactic finishers in wrestling?

Jarrett does have a lot of positives, however. Although he is only 38 years old, he will celebrate his 20th anniversary as a wrestler next year. So he has a veteran's mind in a relatively youthful body. He is one of only two active TNA wrestlers (Nash) who was a world champion (both of WCW) during the Monday night war. And Jarrett still boasts name recognition among casual fans. For those reasons alone, he should be in the main event picture.

What could Jarrett do to prove his worth as NWA champion? Personally, I have never understood why Jarrett doesn't come out and admit right there on TNA TV that he is a minority co-owner of TNA. After all, as soon as it was learned that WWE would be jumping to the USA Network, it was Jarrett who immediately hopped a plane to New York City and met with Viacom executives about the possibility of getting a time slot on Spike TV. Obviously, Jarrett's efforts were successful. Isn't it against Jarrett's character, at least the one he portrays on TV, not to brag about that?

Jarrett sounds ridiculous when he complains that the higher-ups in the NWA and TNA are conspiring against him. He's one of the higher-ups! And virtually every fan knows it because he has done countless interviews for magazines, radio stations, newspapers, and Web sites in which he has freely discussed his role in TNA. Many fans feel as if Jarrett is insulting their intelligence when he portrays himself as one man against the establishment. He is the establishment!

For two decades, Vince McMahon pretended to be nothing more than a straight-laced announcer in WWE. In the late-1990s, even casual fans knew McMahon was actually the owner of the company. That's when crowds began turning against him, and he often received boos even when he entered the arena to do play-by-play work for *Monday Night Raw.* It wasn't until McMahon's true role in WWE was exposed during his feuds with Bret Hart and Steve Austin that fans thought he was finally leveling with them. McMahon started getting good heat when he openly used his power against "Stone-Cold." The angle was rooted in reality, and wrestling seems to be missing that these days.

Jeff Jarrett was not hesitant to pose with his father, Jerry, after they founded TNA in 2002. He acknowledges his real role in the company in mainstream interviews all the time. Why not admit it on *Impact*, too?

Jarrett should follow McMahon's example. He should freely admit that he's a minority owner and that he will go on to use that power to punish his enemies. Is there any better way for a wrestler to gain heat? Now that Chris Harris and James Storm are at his side, won't their careers benefit from being close to a minority co-owner? If Jarrett came clean and admitted that he has used his influence as minority co-owner to remain NWA champion, as his critics suggest he has, it would give him a great deal more credibility with those rowdy fans in Orlando. During an interview session for one of our sister publications, *The Wrestler,* in 2003, Jarrett admitted to me that exploitation of anything rooted in reality was a recipe for success in wrestling. Why doesn't he follow his own advice?

Believe it or not, I already sense a change coming. It's getting to the point that fans can't wait to get into Universal Studios to chant, "Drop the belt!" A wily veteran like Jarrett should be able to exploit any measure of fan enthusiasm to his advantage. If Jarrett can make the fans *love* to hate him, he will have justified his status as TNA's top star. □

the straight shooter

By Dan Murphy

I'M IN A Deep South state of mind. WWE's newest developmental promotion started holding live events in September. Some random thoughts and opinions:

Lash LeRoux has toiled in relative obscurity on the indy circuit since the demise of WCW in 2001. He's hoping to get a fresh start in WWE's new developmental territory, Deep South Wrestling. Some of his relatives have much more important concerns.

•The past few weeks have been the best of times and the worst of times for Lash LeRoux. The former WCW cruiserweight standout (and contributing artist for the *PWI* family of magazines over the last few years) was raised in Oxford, Alabama, about 400 miles away from New Orleans. But LeRoux is extremely proud of the Cajun roots he acquired from his father, a native of Lafayette, Louisiana, and flaunted his "Ragin' Cajun" personality during his WCW run. He served as a grand marshal of the Mardi Gras parade and considered "The Big Easy" to be a home away from home.

While he was trying to focus on getting a fresh start on his career in Deep South, he watched on in dismay as Hurricane Katrina ravaged the city he loved. He checked in on family members living in Vicksburg, Mississippi, that were displaced from their home and were without power for about a week. Through Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, Lash had one anguished eye on the destruction and one hopeful eye on his own future.

Deep South represents a new beginning for LeRoux. WCW never capitalized on his wrestling potential, charisma, and wisecracking personality. WWE never brought him on board after it bought out WCW, and he has languished on the indy circuit for the past four years.

"Refining my skills under Jody Hamilton, who originally trained me at the WCW Power Plant, and Bill DeMott, my former MIA partner in WCW, feels like a return to my wrestling roots," LeRoux told me recently. "This is an opportunity to recapture all the potential that I felt I possessed when I first entered the sport."

Just as the Gulf Coast looks to rebuild for a brighter future, so does LeRoux. As far as I'm concerned, he would make an ideal addition to the Smackdown cruiserweight division.

•Arbitrary are the wrestling gods. Johnny Parisi (nee Swinger) trained alongside Edge and Christian in Sweet Daddy Siki's wrestling gym in Toronto about 10 years ago. Edge and Christian have gone on to WWE greatness, while Swinger has been a journeyman, popping up in WCW, ECW, TNA, and dozens of indy feds along the way. He has finally landed a WWE developmental deal, and he's fighting to show WWE talent scouts he's ready for his promotion to the big time.

Parisi certainly showed some brains by pairing up with the smoking-hot Angel Williams. Go back through your *PWI* collection and find my June 2003 edition of "The Straight Shooter," in which I wrote of Angel: "As for her body, you could grate cheese on her abs. And somebody should steal Tammy Sytch's old Best Buns Slammy and present it to Angel immediately, if not sooner."

Being that she's also a developmental talent, the WWE front office should just call me up and hand me a scouting job already. At least they should return my calls, right? In any case, the restraining order is just excessive. Moving on.

•No one is saying much yet, but a lot of people have their eyes on Ray Gordy, the son of former Freebird and new *Wrestling Observer* Hall of Fame member Terry

Having talked his way out of TNA a few months back, Kid Kash is now based in Deep South, hoping to finally earn a chance to shine in WWE. Dan Murphy still likes his antagonistic style.

Gordy. In the early-1980s, Terry Gordy was considered one of the most athletically gifted big men in wrestling. He certainly didn't have a bodybuilder's physique or the marquee good looks that are in vogue today, but his wrestling and brawling skills were as good as anyone's.

Young Ray is the proverbial puppy with big paws. No one wants to jinx him by comparing him to famous father, but with "Bamm Bamm's" blood running through his veins, you have to think he has the potential to be the next in a growing list of sterling second-generation superstars. Michael Hayes has been seen in the confines of the Deep South Arena. I wonder what he thinks of Ray.

•Deep South is supposed to be all about preparing developmental talents for WWE careers. So why is it that Deep South is *stacked* with tag teams when tag team wrestling in WWE has been put so far back on the burner that it's in danger of falling off the stove?

You have the exciting High Impact (Tony Santorelli and Mike Taylor), Team Elite (Derrick Neikirk and Mike Knox), The Regulators (Mike and Todd Shane), Ryan Reeves and Ryan O'Reilly, and a handful of other pairings, since it seems like everyone wants to get in on the tag scene.

The September 22 card featured two traditional singles matches, one women's match, and four tag matches. If I didn't know any better, I'd think Jim Cornette was running the show.

•Rhetorical question for Jeff G. Bailey: If you show up at the start of a promotion's debut card and cut a promo about how you're going to take over the territory, haven't you already done just that? I mean, you're apparently influential enough to land the first segment in Deep South history. You're already at the top. You can only go downhill from here, I'd imagine.

•Is there a better villain in wrestling today than Kid Kash? It's hard to believe he cut his teeth in this business as David Jericho, teaming with Rick Morton as a version of The Rock 'n' Roll Express. On second thought, that makes perfect sense. Kash absorbed that old Memphis style—how to infuriate fans with a sneer, a gesture, and tossing a cup of water on a kid at ringside. He soaked up the old school approach like a sponge and then wedded that match psychology with the high spot style of ECW and the TNA X division. There will never be another Roddy Piper, but there might never be another "Notorious K.I.D.," either. □

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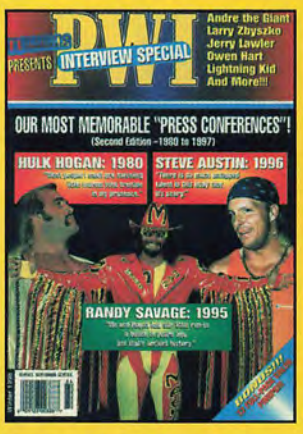

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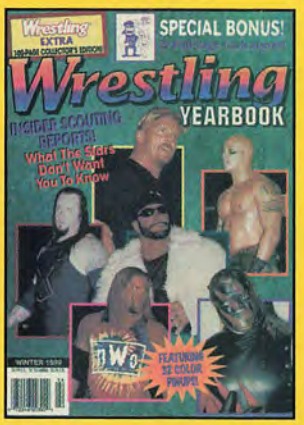

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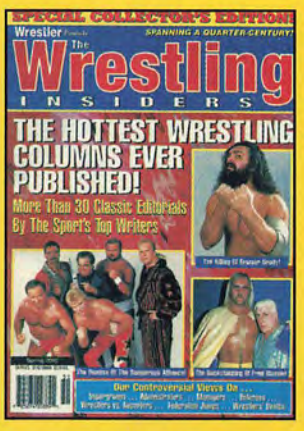

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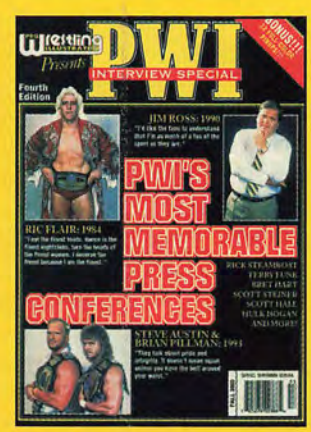

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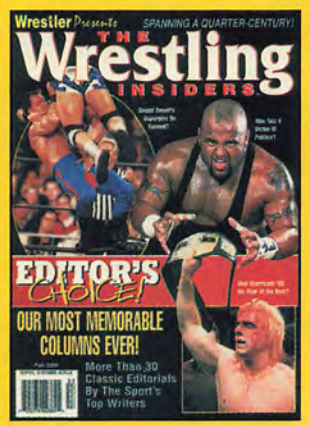

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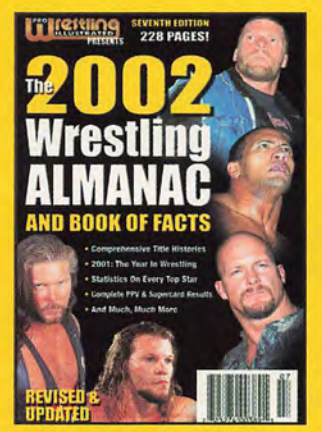

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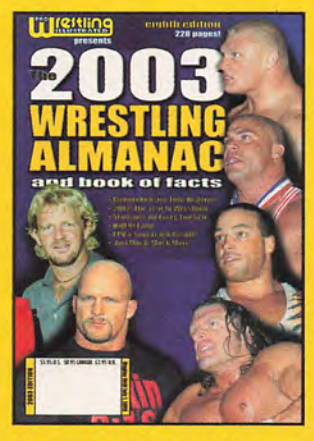

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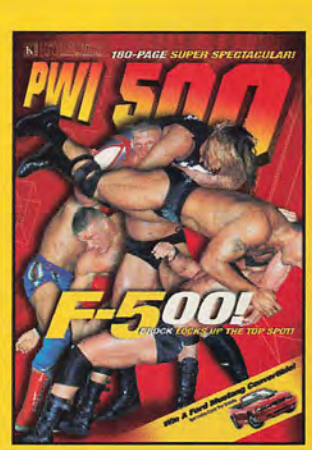

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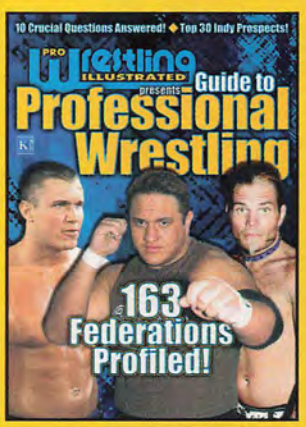

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You're at the airport. You see your favorite wrestler relaxing in one of the terminals. You rush up to him or her as questions fill your excited mind. There are certain things you just *have* to know about this person. Well, these are the 12 questions you'd never think of asking

12 questions

NIGEL McGUINNESS

What's your favorite cereal and why?
Raisin Bran. It keeps me regular.

What country has the craziest fans?
U.S.A. They're all barmy (crazy).

Why the spiky hair?
Because people get bored with wristlocks.

Why the heck do you carry an iron to the ring with you?
It's big, it's heavy, and it knocks people out. It's just like Samoa Joe.

Who does your ironing by the way?
Colt Cabana ... after a few chocolate chip cookies.

Have you ever swallowed your own vomit?
Yes. Where did you hear about that?!

You wrestled for a long time in the Heartland Wrestling Association. Can you do an impersonation of promoter Les Thatcher?
(Inaudible yelling) You bet your sweet ass I can!

There's a pretty popular saying in England, "God save the Queen." Does anyone really want her saved?
Everyone apart from her husband.

You have a choice between Laura Bush, Pee Wee Herman, and Jim Hellwig to live with on a deserted island for the rest of your life. Which would you choose and why?
Jim Hellwig, just so I can learn how to clothesline.

What would it take to get you to shave your head?
A million dollars.

Who was the first celebrity you had a crush on?
Madonna, but that was before I knew what a crush was. It was more of a mild squash.

You have a hammer, midget, and a roulette wheel. What are your plans for the evening?
I'd find out who sold me the crap I was smoking to make me see the midget holding the hammer and punch their head in ... or go into business with him. □

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The Wrestling Observer

Hall of Fame

In each issue, *PWI* honors one member of the *Wrestling Observer* Hall of Fame, but in this issue, we look at the latest group to be inducted into what we recognize as the sport's official Hall of Fame

The Class of 2005

A HARDCORE GENIUS, a cerebral assassin, and a trio of whiskey-swilling rebels make up the *Wrestling Observer* Hall of Fame's Class of 2005.

Paul Heyman, Triple-H, and The Fabulous Freebirds (Michael Hayes, Terry Gordy, and Buddy Roberts) received the requisite number of votes for induction this year, with the election of The Freebirds being called "the most surprising result in the history of the balloting" by *Wrestling Observer* Publisher Dave Meltzer.

Candidates for Hall of Fame induction are voted upon by a panel of wrestling insiders, including past and present wrestlers, promoters, writers, and historians. Voters are asked to evaluate candidates' in-ring ability and/or drawing power, longevity, and their impact on the business. Wrestlers must be at least 35 years old or entering their 15th year in the sport.

For induction, candidates must receive at least 60 percent of votes in their home region, ensuring all candidates are evaluated by an informed panel, regardless of territorial boundaries.

The Freebirds received a total of 133 votes for 73 percent of the vote from respondents in the U.S. and Canada. They become only the fourth tag team unit in the Hall of Fame based on being a unit, follow-

The Freebirds—Michael Hayes, Buddy Roberts, and Terry Gordy—were a supergroup that really was at least a few years ahead of its time. Their induction was a surprise, especially since they made it by such a comfortable margin after years of falling short.

Gordy (shown against One Man Gang) provided a lot of the muscle for The Freebirds, and he went on to enjoy a great deal of success on his own prior to his death.

ing The Fabulous Kangaroos, The Road Warriors, and The Dusek Riot Squad.

The induction of The Freebirds—particularly by such a decisive margin—came as a surprise because The Freebirds had been eligible for the Hall of Fame for several years but had never garnered enough votes for induction.

Each Freebird had a unique role on the team. Hayes was the golden-haired promo master. Gordy was the massive workhorse. And Roberts was the grizzled veteran. Together, they became one of the most hated and influential teams in wrestling history.

Hayes and Gordy began to build the Freebird gimmick in Memphis for promoter Jerry Jarrett before moving to Mid-South Wrestling (where they recruited Roberts) and then to Georgia Championship Wrestling. The Freebirds had their biggest impact in the World Class territory in Texas. On December 25, 1982, 12,000 fans turned out to watch Ric Flair defend the NWA World title against Kerry Von Erich in a steel cage match, with Hayes as guest referee. When Von Erich refused to accept help from Hayes, Hayes turned against him, leading to Gordy slamming the cage door on Von Erich's head—a shocking move at the time.

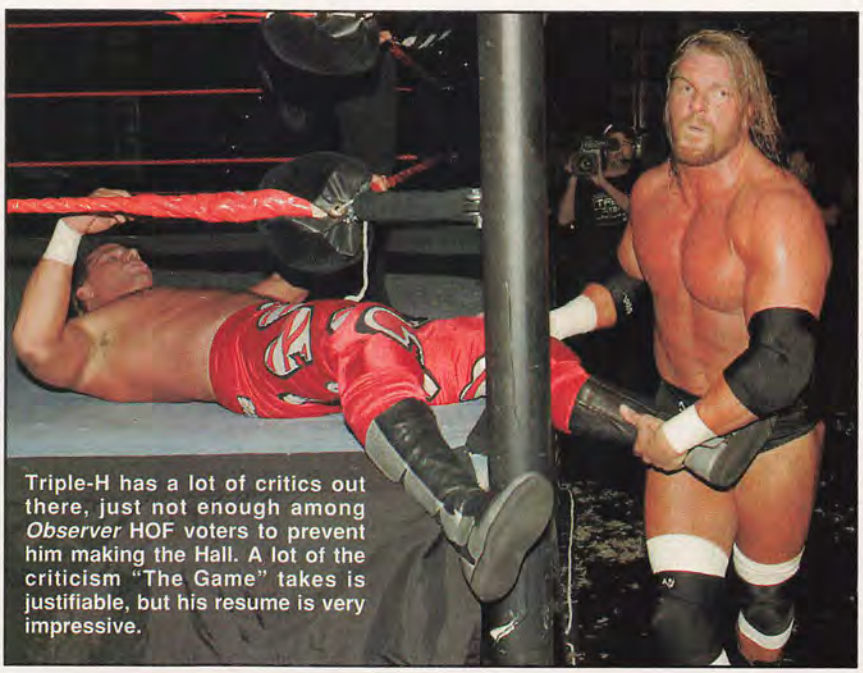
That match ignited the Von Erichs-Freebirds feud that would headline World Class for the next 18 months. The 'Birds made brief stops in the WWF, AWA, and UWF until the team fragmented, with Gordy going on to singles fame in Japan and Hayes forming a new version of the group with Jimmy Garvin in WCW. They are credited with helping to popularize ring entrances set to music and "the Freebird rule," meaning any two could team as The Freebirds (and defend titles), so opponents never knew exactly whom they were going to face on a given night.

Triple-H looked to be a slam dunk selection, as he is still at the top of his game and has headlined some of the highest-grossing pay-per-view events in wrestling history. He received 121 votes, good for 66 percent from respondents in the U.S. and Canada.

"He was both the top heel during the most financially successful period for any wrestling company in business history, and has had a slew of great matches," Meltzer wrote.

Triple-H is a 10-time world champion and has been WWE's top heel of this decade. He became the first heel to win the main event of WrestleMania at 'Mania XVI, besting The Rock, Mick Foley, and The Big Show in a four-way elimination match. However, Triple-H will always be dogged by the fact that he married into the McMahon family. No matter what he accomplishes in the ring, there will always be the perception that he owes at least part of his success to his political ties. While HHH has had extremely profitable feuds with Batista and Shawn Michaels, he has also been part of disappointing ones with Scott Steiner, Booker T, and others.

"As far as HHH's enduring legacy, it will no doubt end up being just as it appears today—highly controversial," Meltzer wrote.



Triple-H has a lot of critics out there, just not enough among *Observer* HOF voters to prevent him making the Hall. A lot of the criticism "The Game" takes is justifiable, but his resume is very impressive.

Although in hindsight Paul Heyman probably wishes he hadn't made Mike Awesome ECW champ, he did do a lot more good and innovative than bad, at least creatively, when he took ECW to the extreme.

Dick Murdoch came up less than 10 votes short of the number required for induction this year. Perhaps if his "namesake," Trevor Murdoch, enjoys great success with Raw in the next year, more voters will cast ballots for him in 2006.

Paul Heyman might owe his induction to the resurgence of ECW this year and the blockbuster sales of *The Rise And Fall Of ECW* DVD. Heyman received 113 votes, good for 62 percent of the vote from respondents in the U.S. and Canada. Heyman got his start in wrestling as a photographer, with his work occasionally appearing in the *PWI* family of magazines. In 1986, he debuted as a manager under the name Paul E. Dangerously in the Florida territory, working for promoter Kevin Sullivan. In 1987, he moved to Memphis, where he managed Austin Idol in a bloody feud against Jerry Lawler.

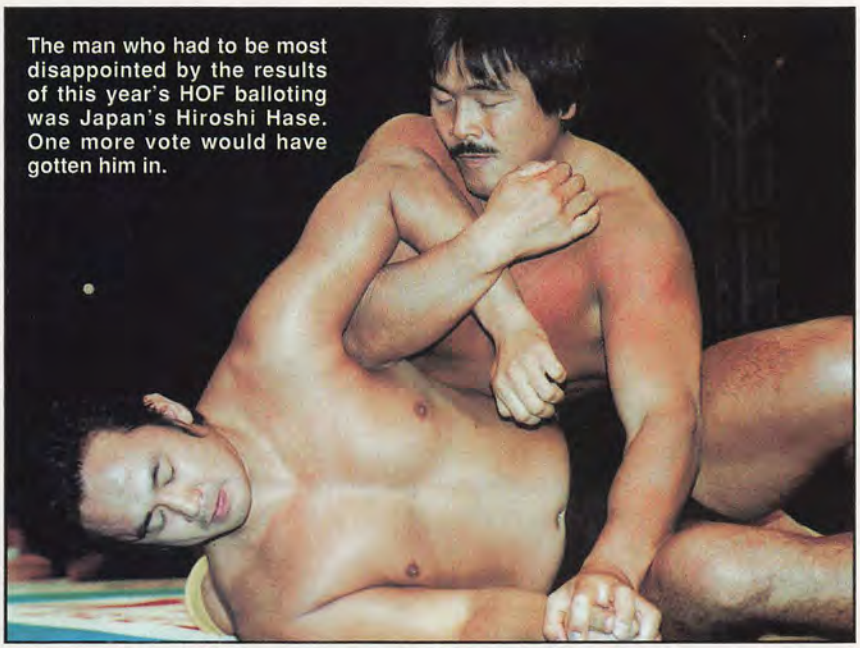
In 1987, he turned up in the AWA managing The Original Midnight Express, Dennis Condrey and Randy Rose. Dangerously and his Midnights invaded the NWA the following year and feuded with Jim Cornette's version of The Midnight Express. Heyman remained with WCW until 1992, most notably managing The Dangerous Alliance (Steve Austin, Rick Rude, Bobby Eaton, Arn Anderson, Madusa, and Larry Zbyszko).

After leaving WCW, Heyman began working with Tod Gordon in booking the fledgling Eastern Championship Wrestling, which evolved into Extreme Championship Wrestling.

ECW helped to revolutionize pro wrestling in the 1990s, thanks to Heyman's ability to develop intriguing storylines, create complex, larger-than-life characters, and incredible marketing and promotion. While ECW eventually lost millions of dollars and Heyman declared personal bankruptcy, five years after the company folded fans continue to chant "E-C-W!" at WWE events and clamor for more ECW reunion shows.

Heyman briefly was a part of WWE Creative and is responsible for building one of the most passionate fan bases one small promotion has ever seen. At press time, he was the matchmaker for OVW, WWE's top developmental territory.

Wrestlers receiving less than 10 percent of the vote—who will be dropped from the ballot—include Lonnie "Moondog" Mayne, Don Muraco, and Yoshihiro Takayama. □



The man who had to be most disappointed by the results of this year's HOF balloting was Japan's Hiroshi Hase. One more vote would have gotten him in.

The Wrestling Observer Hall of Fame

1996 INDUCTEES

Abdullah the Butcher
Perro Aguayo
Andre the Giant
Bert Assirati
Shohei "Giant" Baba
Jim Barnett
Wild Red Berry
Fred Blassie
Blue Demon
Nick Bockwinkel
Paul Boesch
Bobo Brazil
Jack Brisco
Bruiser Brody
Mildred Burke
El Canek
Negro Casas
Riki Choshu
Jim Cornette
The Crusher
Alfonso Dantes
The Destroyer
Ted DiBiase
Dick the Bruiser
Dusek Family
Dynamite Kid
Fabulous Kangaroos
Jackie Fargo
Ric Flair
Tatsumi Fujinami
Dory Funk Jr.
Dory Funk Sr.
Terry Funk
Verne Gagne
Cavernario Galindo
Ed Don George
Gorgeous George
Frank Gotch
Karl Gotch
Superstar Graham
Eddie Graham
Rene Guajardo
Gory Guerrero
George Hackenschmidt
Stan Hansen
Bret Hart
Stu Hart
Bobby Heenan
Danny Hodge
Hulk Hogan
Antonio Inoki
Rayo de Jalisco Sr.
Tom Jenkins
Don Leo Jonathan
Gene Kiniski
Fred Kohler
Killer Kowalski
Ernie Ladd
Dick Lane
Jerry Lawler
Strangler Lewis
Jim Londos
Salvador Lutteroth
Akira Maeda
Devil Masami
Mil Mascaras
Dump Matsumoto
Earl McCready
Leroy McGuirk
Vince McMahon Jr.
Vince McMahon Sr.
Danny McShane
Rey Mendoza
Mitsuharu Misawa
Joe "Toots" Mondt
Sam Muchnick
Bronko Nagurski
Pat O'Connor
Kintaro Oki
Atsushi Onita
Pat Patterson
Antonio Pena
John Pesek
Roddy Piper
Harley Race
Dusty Rhodes
Rikidozan
Road Warriors
Yvon Robert
Billy Robinson
Antonino Rocca
Buddy Rogers
Lance Russell
Bruno Sammartino
El Santo
Jackie Sato
Randy Savage
Billy Shadow
The Sheik
Hisashi Shinma
Dara Singh
Gordon Solie
El Solitario
Rick Steamboat
Joe Stecher
Tony Stecher
Ray Steele
Ray Stevens
Nobuhiko Takada
Genichiro Tenryu
Lou Thesz
Tiger Mask (Satoru Sayama)
Jumbo Tsuruta
Frank Tunney
Mad Dog Vachon
Big Van Vader
Johnny Valentine
Fritz Von Erich
Whipper Billy Watson
Bill Watts
Jaguar Yokota
Stanislaus Zbyszko

1997 INDUCTEES

Edouard Carpentier
Toshiaki Kawada
Jimmy Lennon
William Muldoon
Chigusa Nagayo

1998 INDUCTEE

Dos Caras

1999 INDUCTEES

Lioness Asuka
Jushin Liger
Keiji Muto
Jim Ross

2000 INDUCTEES

Steve Austin
Mick Foley
Shinya Hashimoto
Akira Hokuto
Bill Longson
Frank Sexton
Sandor Szabo

2001 INDUCTEES

Black Shadow
Diablo Velasco
Lizmark
Bull Nakano
El Satanico

2002 INDUCTEES

Martin "Farmer" Burns
Jack Curley
Kenta Kobashi
Wahoo McDaniel
Manami Toyota

2003 INDUCTEES

Chris Benoit
Earl Caddock
Francisco Flores
Shawn Michaels

2004 INDUCTEES

Kazushi Sakuraba
The Undertaker
Bob Backlund
Masahiro Chono
Ultimo Dragon
Kurt Angle
Carlos "Tarzan" Lopez

2005 INDUCTEES

The Freebirds
Triple-H
Paul Heyman

2005 Hall of Fame Balloting Results

NAME	VOTES	%
Fabulous Freebirds	133	73
Triple-H	121	66
Paul Heyman	113	62
Hiroshi Hase	66	59
Jesse Ventura	107	58
Masakatsu Funaki	64	57
Dick Murdoch	102	56
Aja Kong	61	54
Dr. Wagner Sr.	53	52
Carlos Colon	93	51
Villano III	51	50
The Rock 'n' Roll Express	88	48
The Midnight Express	85	46
Johnny "Mr. Wrestling II" Walker	74	40
Gorilla Monsoon	73	40
Jimmy Snuka	70	38
Roy Shire	68	37
Fabulous Moolah	64	35
Eddie Guerrero	63	34
Don Owen	62	34
Kensuke Sasaki	37	33
Kiyoshi Tamura	37	33
Sting	59	32
Sabu	57	31
Gene & Ole Anderson	55	30
Bill Miller	54	30
Blue Panther	31	30
Tim "Mr. Wrestling" Woods	52	28
Owen Hart	51	28
Ivan Koloff	49	27
Curt Hennig	48	26
Jerry Jarrett	43	23
Arn Anderson	38	21
Masked Assassins	34	19
Red Bastien	30	16
Rick Rude	26	14
Volk Han	16	14
Seiji Sakaguchi	16	14
Masa Saito	15	13
Mark Lewin	22	12
John Tolos	22	12
Jun Akiyama	13	12
Jose Lothario	21	11
Konnan	11	11
Chris Jericho	19	10
Wilbur Snyder	19	10
Paul Orndorff	18	10

Votes needed for induction into Hall of Fame:
U.S. and Canada—110; Japan—67; Mexico—61

independent roundup

By Liz Hunter

ABYSS MIGHT BE having the best fall season ever. Despite his lack of championship success in his home promotion of TNA, he has started collecting indy gold. First, he defeated fellow TNA competitor **Bobby Roode** for the Border City Wrestling heavyweight title on September 15—on the same card that saw **Jeff Jarrett** regain the NWA heavyweight title from **Raven**.

Just a few weeks later, Abyss descended upon NWA Central States in Kansas, where he defeated **Tyler Cool** to win the NWA Missouri heavyweight title on October 7. It was Abyss' first match for the promotion. One has to wonder if garnering indy success is part of **Father James Mitchell's** grand scheme for his charge. Before hooking up with Mitchell, Abyss was just another hairy big guy who would plod through matches on his way to victory. Maybe the devilish one is helping Abyss focus his fury on something shiny, like title belts. Who knows if his path of terror will end with him capturing gold in TNA.

Abyss is on a bit of a championship tear—but it's not in TNA, unfortunately. He spent a good part of his autumn collecting independent titles.

Matt Sydal is the winner of this year's Ted Petty Invitational Tournament, hosted by IWA Mid-South. The two-day event, held on September 24 and 25, featured a slew of top independent wrestlers from around the country. Sydal defeated **Kevin Steen** and **Arik Cannon** in the final bout to win the tournament.

Pro Wrestling NOAH's **Kenta Kobashi** toured the U.S. recently, wrestling for both World League Wrestling and Ring of Honor. While in WLW, Kobashi defeated **Wade Chism** in the first match of his mini-tour. The highlight of the tour for any Kobashi fan, though, was his bout against **Samoa Joe** in New York on October 1. The two behemoths beat the heck out of each other in a spectacular match that had both the fans and a lot of the wrestlers in attendance cheering the action. Many fans walked out of the New Yorker saying that the bout was the independent match of the year. We'll see how it fares in balloting for *PWI's* Match of the Year. Achievement Award results will be revealed in the special year-end issue of *PWI,* cover-dated March 2006 and available on January 24

In this month's stipulation matches, **Jimmy Golden** dropped a loser-leaves-town match to **Bob Armstrong** on the October 8 NWA Wrestle Birmingham show … NWA Battlezone's **Shea Crosby** is now bald thanks to **The Enhancement Kid**. Kid defeated Crosby in a hair vs. mask match on October 1 … **Mike Foxx** is gone from Professional Championship Wrestling after dropping a loser-leaves-PCW match to **Mace Malone** on September 24.

We're sad to report that Tennessee independent wrestler **Trae Kellar** died on September 20 of a heart attack at his home in Brownsville, Tennessee. Kellar was 36 … NWA Universal has ceased operations. The Oklahoma-based promotion had been around for two years and was a staple of the Midwest.

Quick title changes: Extreme War, Cleveland,

OH, October 8: **2 Phat** defeated **Simply the Best** to win the vacant tag team title ... ***NWA Wrestle Birmingham, Birmingham, AL, October 8:*** **Jesse James** beat **Tom Prichard** to win the NWA Alabama heavyweight title ... ***Professional Championship Wrestling, Arlington, TX, October 8:*** **The Bluechippers** beat **The Dark Circle**, **The Elite**, and **Stephen Murphy** and **Kevin Paine** in an elimination match to win the tag team belts ... ***Steel Rage Pro Wrestling, Sapulpa, OK, October 7:*** **Shane Morbid** defeated heavyweight champion **Harry Sanchez** for the title ... ***Xtreme Championship Wrestling, Denton, TX, October 7:*** **Jack Drastic** beat **Jared Steele** to win the TNT belt ... **Al Jackson** beat **Kit Carson** to win the heavyweight belt ... ***Exodus Wrestling Alliance, Mooresville, NC, October 4:*** **Masked Superstar** defeated heavyweight champion **Jason Jones** for the title ... ***Supreme Pro Wrestling, Sacramento, CA, October 2:*** **Adam Thornstowe** and **Steel** beat **J.D. Bishop** and **Brian Raymond** to win the vacant tag team title ... ***Ring of Honor, New York, NY, October 1:*** **Sal Rinauro** and **Tony Mamaluke** beat **B.J. Whitmer** and **Jimmy Jacobs** to win the tag team title ... ***Summit Wrestling Association, Summit, PA, October 1:*** **Billy Johnson** and **Chucky Wynn** won a tag team royal rumble to win the tag team title ... ***TLCW, Ripley, TN, October 1:*** **Kilo** defeated **El Loco** to become the new heavyweight champion ... **Les James** defeated **T.J. Money** to become the new lightweight champion ... **The Missouri Wrecking Crew** defeated **The P.H.A.T. Boyz** in a double-dog-collar match to become the new tag team champions ... ***New Millennium Championship Wrestling, Lancaster, SC, September 30:*** **Tim Hunter** defeated heavyweight champion **Shane Austin** in an cage match to win the title ... ***Xtreme Championship Wrestling, Denton, TX, September 30:*** **Kit Carson** defeated **Drunk Adam** for the heavyweight championship ... ***Squared Circle Championship Wrestling, McKenzie, TN, September 30:*** **Weasel** defeated **Steven Rampage** to become the new Southern heavyweight champion ... ***Salt River Wrestling, Glensboro, KY, September 30:*** **Kevin Star** defeated U.S. champion **Hamid Jihad** to win the title ... ***United Wrestling Federations, Westminster, SC, September 25:*** **Shannon Moore** beat AWA light heavyweight/OMEGA champion **Krazy K** in a best-of-three-falls match to win the title ... **Toni Monroe** beat **Brandy Scotch** to win the MAXW women's title ... **Roxi Nagasaki** won a 25-man battle royal to claim the SWA pure grand prix title ... ***Championship Wrestling, Kingsport, TN, September 24:*** **Robbie Cassidy** defeated TV champion **Tony Givens** to win the title ... ***Iron Ring Wrestling, Appalachia, VA, September 24:*** **David Flair** pinned **Jeff Tankersley** to become the new heavyweight champion ... ***Pinnacle Pro Wrestling, Pacific, WA, September 24:*** **The Reason** beat **Jack Evans** to win the Pinnacle title ... ***Gateway Championship Wrestling, Cape Girardeau, MO, September 24:*** **Cameron Cage** beat heavyweight champion **Kory Twist** and **Jerry Lynn** in a triple threat match to win the title ... ***Metro Pro Wrestling, Dearborn, Mi, September 23:*** **Phil Atlas** and **El Reverso** beat tag champions **Monsters Inc.** to win the title ... **Brad Martin** pinned cruiserweight champion **Gary Dawson** for the title ... **Amazing N8** pinned **Gutter** to become the new metropolitan champion ... ***IWA Flashfire, Hartwell, GA, September 17:*** **Jason Swords** pinned **Casey J** in a falls-count-anywhere match to win the U.S. title. □

Here's your 2005 Ted Petty Invitational winner, Matt Sydal. He outlasted a whole slew of independent wrestlers to win the two-day tournament in Indiana.

the international report

By Mike Spillane

SUMO STAR **AKEBONO** is probably known only to American fans for his novelty match opposite **The Big Show** at WrestleMania 21. The former yokozuna ("grand champion") was something of a sports icon in Japan before a number of lopsided martial arts fights diminished his popularity. Like many other wrestlers, his ventures into MMA fighting left him with a string of humiliating defeats and not a single victory. Many felt Akebono had lost his edge. Sumo purists in particular were outraged at the idea of Akebono performing with WWE. To many, it seemed that Akebono's career was spiraling downward into obscurity and oblivion.

Ever resilient, Akebono has begun to prove his critics and detractors to be wrong. A few months back, Akebono began training in the All-Japan Pro Wrestling dojo under the instruction of **Kaz Hayashi**. While Hayashi is one of the world's finest light heavyweights, and Akebono's weight clearly places him at the opposite end of the spectrum, the two have made a fine team, so much so that Akebono picked up pro wrestling at an amazingly quick rate, and the two unlikely partners have proven to be excellent training mates.

Who would have thought that a massive sumo wrestler would be the man to spark a turnaround in business for the slumping All-Japan? Akebono has done it with some help from an unlikely source. Whether the good times will continue for the company and/or Akebono remains to be seen.

By the time you read this, Akebono will have finished his first complete tour with All-Japan Pro Wrestling, and the results have been nothing but positive. All-Japan, which has fallen to a distant third behind Pro Wrestling NOAH and New Japan Pro Wrestling in the *puroresu* landscape, had been limping through poorly attended tours for the entire year. Since adding Akebono to the roster, attendance figures have swelled, and the company is seeing some of its best houses in some time. How long Akebono will remain a draw is anyone's guess, but as the sumo star begins to rise up the cards, it will be interesting to see if attendance also continues to rise. With a little polish and the right opponents, Akebono might not only ascend to sports icon status once again, but help pull All-Japan out of its business slump.

While All-Japan has been fighting a business downturn all year, 2005 has been a box office smash for Mexican promotion Consejo Mundial de Lucha Libre. CMLL (known in years past as EMLL) has been doing record business not just at its home base of Arena Mexico (in Mexico City), but also at all its satellite buildings, called Arena Coliseo. CMLL's 72nd anniversary card in mid-September saw yet another sellout crowd, with many more turned away at the door, for a three-way dance with each wrestler's hair at stake.

Perro Aguayo Jr., **Universo 2000**, and **Hector Garza** did battle in the quickly assembled main event, which ended with Garza shaved bald in center ring. Originally, the match intended to headline this giant event was a mask vs. mask bout between popular *technicos* **Atlantis** and **Dr. Wagner Jr.** A few weeks prior to the event, the match was scrapped for reasons not made clear, although most likely the stakes were too high for the liking of one or both of the competitors. Since then, Atlantis, the perennial *technico* dating back some two decades, turned *rudo* by abandoning his *technico* partners in one match, and then illegally unmasking Dr. Wagner later in the night. Atlantis enjoyed two great spurts of popularity in the late-1980s, teaming with his now-retired brother **Atlantico**, and again in 2000 leading up to his mask vs. mask win over **Villano III** on the first CMLL pay-per-view. Especially since his feud with red-hot *technico* Wagner began, fans

have been anticipating his conversion to the *rudo* side.

Two of Mexico's premier high-flyers, about whom you might have read just two months ago in this very column, are now on the sidelines. **Extreme Tiger**, the Tijuana-based aerialist has suffered a burst appendix and is currently recuperating. No time frame has been set for his return. **Mistico**, who is partially responsible for the resurgence of CMLL, fractured his pelvis, but has been trying to work through it. Lately, he's been wrestling in trios matches in an effort by matchmakers to protect the injured star. The perils of the high-risk style these men utilize are obvious, and unfortunately for these exciting daredevils, injuries are part of the job.

Milano Collection AT isn't exactly the catchiest of monikers. Nevertheless, the talented former Ultimo Dragon protege has been doing well for himself on the U.S. independent scene and even won over some hard-to-please Ring of Honor fans.

In Argentina, there's yet another effort underway to restart the popular *Titanes en el Ring* (literally, "titans in the ring") company, which enjoyed terrific success in the 1970s and 1980s. Filled with oddball characters and movie monster-like villains, *Titanes en el Ring* holds a place in Argentinian pop culture similar to the kind of position the WWF held in the U.S. in the '80s. *Titanes en el Ring* enjoyed periods of tremendous success, as well as some of waning popularity, before practically vanishing in the 1990s. Now, many of the children that grew up with the heroes of *Titanes* are old enough to take to the ring themselves, and it seems that yet another incarnation of this odd Argentinian wrestling company is set to launch anew.

If there was ever a place for modern wrestling to have a bit of a renaissance, it's Italy. Sparked by a short tour by New Japan Pro Wrestling earlier in 2005, and with the recent ratings success of *Smackdown* in Italy, wrestling is making a major comeback. Giant crowds are turning out for Italian independent shows, many of which are now loaded with many of the recent releases from WWE. Whereas crowds from a year ago numbered in the hundreds of fans, even in major cities like Rome, the Italian scene is now delivering attendance figures in the thousands, even in remote locations. With changing television schedules helping bring new programming to certain parts of continental Europe, wrestling might also enjoy a resurgence in Spain and Portugal, where the scene has been practically nonexistent in the last decade.

Among Japan's hottest young stars of the new millennium is **Milano Collection AT**. Formerly of the T2P and **Ultimo Dragon's** Toryumon, he parted ways with that company in the summer of 2004 to join **Tokyo Magnum's** Dragon Gate promotion. However, after just a few months there, Milano went freelance and dropped off the wrestling radar. A short while later, he resurfaced in San Antonio, Texas, plying his trade for the TWE, a company recommended to him by WWE's **Sho Funaki**. When Funaki left Michinoku Pro for the WWF back in 1997, he relocated to Texas to train under **Shawn Michaels**, who was retired at the time. Funaki still resides in Texas.

Now, Milano Collection AT is springing up in NWA Anarchy, Ring of Honor, and CHIKARA on a frequent basis and bringing his high-tech hybrid of Lucha Libre and submission wrestling to American fans all over the country. In his short stay thus far, he's already captured the TWE title, battled **Samoa Joe**, entered CHIKARA's second annual Torneo Cibernetico, and won over audiences everywhere he has gone. He'll remain in the States a while longer before making a decision about pursuing new opportunities in his native Japan.

A slew of stars from the United Kingdom are making their way to America as well. English wrestlers **T.J. Cain** and **Jervis Cottonbelly** will both be stateside for the autumn months, gaining experience on the East Coast independent scene. Scottish wrestler **Jay Phoenix** will be making his first visit to the United States to further his training during a short stay. From Ireland comes **Fergal Devitt**, who is already making waves in the New England scene, wrestling for NECW and other area independents. Devitt is among Ireland's finest talents and is poised to have a breakout year in 2006, thanks in large part to his increased exposure here in the United States. □

arena reports

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E-mail results to PWIQueen@aol.com.

Spotlight Card of the Month

ODENTON, MD—Fort Meade Wrestling at the Pavilion: **Dino Divine, Chad Bowman**, & **Jason Static** defeated **Earl the Pearl, Rich Myers**, & **Genesis** ... **Marcus Jordan** beat **Buck Child** ... **Josh Daniels** defeated **Andrew Ryker** ... **The Patriot** & **Romeo Valentino** beat **King Kaluha** & **Eagle** ... CZW heavyweight champion **Ruckus** beat CZW junior heavyweight champion **Derek Frazier** in a double-tables match ... The King of the Pavilion battle royal ended in a no-contest when **The Bruiser** interfered ... **Axl Rotten** pinned **The Bruiser** in a hardcore challenge match ... **Kylie Pierce** pinned **Angela** (**Tara** was the guest referee) ... **Jerry Lawler** pinned **Kip James**.
(10-01-05)

—"Spotlight" photos by Timothy A. Walker

UNITED STATES

ALABAMA

BIRMINGHAM—NWA Wrestle Birmingham at the Boutwell Auditorium: **Sonny Siaki** beat **The Wrestler** ... **Mike Jackson** & **Tony Ladu** beat **Jimmy Powell** & **Alan Martin** by disqualification ... **River D'Angelo** wrestled **Bill Franklin** to a no-contest ... **Sonny Siaki** beat **Ranger Ross** ... **Jimmy Powell** beat **Brad Armstrong** ... **McNasty** beat **Bill Dundee** ... **Elix Skipper** wrestled **Steve Armstrong** to a time-limit draw ... **Roy Lee Welch** beat **Dennis Condrey** ... **Adrian Street** wrestled **Wendell Cooley** to a no-contest ... **Jesse James** beat **Tom Prichard** to win the NWA Alabama heavyweight title ... **Bob Armstrong** beat **Jimmy Golden** in a loser-leaves-town match.
(10-08-05)

—Bob Boxer

ARKANSAS

TEXARKANA—WWE at the Four States Fairgrounds: Raw tag team champions **The Hurricane** & **Rosey** defeated **Lance Cade** & **Trevor Murdoch** ... **The Freakin' Deacon** defeated **Mike Mizanin** ... **Rob Conway** pinned **Eugene** ... **Chris Masters** defeated **Viscera** ... **Shelton Benjamin** pinned **Kerwin White** ... **The Big Show** pinned **Gene Snitsky** ... **Ashley Massaro** & **Trish Stratus** beat **Victoria** & **Torrie Wilson** ... **Edge** pinned **Matt Hardy** ... WWE champion **John Cena** beat **Kurt Angle** & **Tyson Tomko** in a handicap match.
(09-10-05)

—Ned Blazer

JONESBORO—WWE at the ASU Convocation Center: Raw tag team champions **The Hurricane** & **Rosey** defeated **Lance Cade** & **Trevor Murdoch** ... **The Freakin' Deacon** pinned **Mike Mizanin** ... **Eugene** pinned **Rob Conway** ... **Chris Masters** beat **Viscera** ... **Shelton Benjamin** pinned **Kerwin White** ... **The Big Show** pinned **Gene Snitsky** ... **Ashley Massaro** & **Trish Stratus** beat **Torrie Wilson** & **Victoria** ... **Edge** pinned **Matt Hardy** ... WWE champion **John Cena** defeated **Kurt Angle** by disqualification.
(09-09-05)

—William Harding

CALIFORNIA

SACRAMENTO—Supreme Pro Wrestling at St. Peter's Hall: ***In a "Lethal Lottery" tournament for the vacant tag title, quarterfinals***: **Brian Raymond** & **DJ Rizz** beat **Tito Aquino** & **D-Unit** ... **Adam Thornstowe** & **Steel** beat **Vinny Massaro** & **Dante** ... **Sir Samurai** & **Dub C** beat **Hector Camote** & **Rik Luxury** ... **J.D. Bishop** & **Chico Escuela** beat **Bonzai Bruce** & **Mike Rayne** ... ***Semifinals***: **Adam Thornstowe** & **Steel** beat **Sir Samurai** & **Dub C** ... When **J.D. Bishop** & **Chico Escuela** wrestled **Brian Raymond** & **DJ Rizz**, it was ruled that Bishop & Raymond advanced in the tournament when they made Rizz and Escuela tap out simultaneously ... ***Finals:*** **Adam Thornstowe** & **Steel** beat **J.D. Bishop** & **Brian Raymond** to win the vacant tag team title ... ***In non-tournament matches***: **Seito Hayashi** pinned **Tim Moura** ... Heavyweight champ **Oliver John** beat **El Flaco Loco.**
(10-02-05)

—Judy Ludwick

DELAWARE

NEWARK—East Coast Wrestling Association at the Greater Newark Boys' & Girls' Club: Heavyweight champion **Scotty Charisma** defeated **Vic D. Vine** ... Mid-Atlantic champion **Chase Del Monte** defeated **Andrew Ryker** ... **Charlie Haas** defeated **Low-Ki** ... **Cheetah Master** & **Freak Nastty** wrestled to a no-contest ... **Mike Kruel** beat **Ace Darling** ... **Mark Milonas** defeated **Johnny Maxx** ... **The Chick Magnets** defeated **Mega** in a handicap match ... **Mr. Ooh La La** defeated **The Japanese Pool Boy** ... **The O.C. Boyz** & **Jim Kettner** defeated **Carlton P. Hightower** & **The Valedictorians.**
(09-24-05)

—Robert Bennett

FLORIDA

SEBRING—Maximum Xtreme Pro Wrestling at the High School: **Billy Gunn** won a battle royal ... **Hack Meyers** beat **Billy Gunn** ... Heavyweight champion **Chaz** beat **Joe Gomez** ... **Tower** wrestled **The Warlord** to a double-countout ... **Kahagas** beat **Johnny Vandal** ... **Preston James** & **Scott Commodity** beat **Frankie Lancaster** & **Brian Gamble** ... **Rick the Reaper** beat **Howie Godwin** by countout ... **The Blackheart** beat **Aaron Epic**.
(10-08-05)

—Lina Himes

Buck Child crimped the style of "Supermodel" Marcus Jordan with this back bodydrop. Unfortunately, it didn't lead to a victory.

SANFORD—Pro Wrestling Warfare at the Civic Center: **Delirious** pinned **Vordell Walker** ... **Dagon Briggs** pinned **Naphtali** ... **Vito DeNucci** defeated **Rip Malibu** ... **Chasyn Rance** beat **Ryan Tillman** ... **Buck Quartermain** & **The Saint** beat **Tom Lawler** & **J.P. Ace** ... **Sedrick Strong** beat **Ricky Reyes** ... **Frankie Capone** & **Thump Dupree** pinned **Aaron Epic** & **Omega Vega** ... **Bruce Steele** defeated **Tom Carter**.
(10-07-05)

—Brady Lawrence

ORLANDO—TNA Unbreakable pay-per-view at Universal Studios: **B.G. James**, **Ron Killings**, & **Konnan** defeated **Simon Diamond**, **Elix Skipper**, & **David Young** ... **Austin Aries** pinned **Roderick Strong** ... **Monty Brown** & **Kip James** defeated **Apolo** & **Lance Hoyt** ... **Chris Sabin** pinned **Petey Williams** ... **Abyss** pinned **Sabu** ... **Bobby Rude** pinned **Jeff Hardy** ... NWA tag team champions **Andy Douglas** & **Chase Stevens** defeated **A-1** & **Eric Young**, **Chris Harris** & **James Storm**, and **Alex Shelley** & **Johnny Candido** (substituting for **Sean Waltman**) in a four-way elimination match ... NWA heavyweight champion **Raven** pinned **Rhino** in a "Raven's Rules" match ... **A.J. Styles** beat TNA X champion **Christopher Daniels** and **Samoa Joe** in a three-way match to win the title when he pinned Daniels.
(09-11-05)

—Frank Krewda

GEORGIA

CORNELIA—NWA Anarchy at the NWA Arena: **Jay Fury** beat **Hayden Young** ... **Cru Jones** & **Ken Westbrooks** beat **Andrew Alexander** & **Stryknyn** ... **Krazy K** & **Dexter Poindexter** beat **Seth Delay** & **Patrick Bentley** ... **Onyx** beat **Todd Sexton** ... **Azrael** wrestled **Slim J** to a no-contest ... Tag champs **Adam Roberts** & **T.C. Carnage** defeated **Sweet Dreams** & **Wolfman** ... TV champ **Jeff Lewis** pinned **Vordell Walker** ... **Nick Halen** beat **Skeeter Frost** in "chairs legal" match ... Heavyweight champ **Mikal Adryan** beat **Nemesis**.
(10-01-05)

—Larry Goodman

CANTON—Pro Wrestling Evolution at the National Guard Armory: **Biohazard** beat **The Black Pegasus** ... **Kyle Matthews** beat **Tyler Smith** ... **Justin Sane** wrestled **John Doe** to a no-contest ... **Scott Steele** beat **Jason Blackman** ... **Darin Childs** won a three-way dance against **Jacob Ladder** and **Biohazard** ... **Brad Armstrong** wrestled **Glacier** to a no-contest ... **Iceberg** beat **Murder One** in a lumberjack match.
(09-17-05)

—Michelle McIntyre

ILLINOIS

SUMNER—National Wrestling Coalition at the Fall Festival: **Kid Justice** pinned **The Violator** ... **E.Z. Rider** & **Guardian Angel** defeated **Super Destroyer** & **Cowboy** ... **Lady Vendetta** beat **Scarlett Rose** ... **George the Animal Jr.** & **George the Animal III** defeated **Carnage** & **Ice Cold Outlaw** ... American champion **The Intimidator** beat **Reaper** and **Kannibal** ... **Vulcan** defeated heavyweight champion **Steven Davis** in a non-title match.
(09-10-05)

—Brad Smithson

INDIANA

MADISON—AWA Supreme Championship Wrestling at the SCW Building: **American Superstar** pinned **Maliki** ... **T-Dogg** beat **Live Wire** by knockout in a "wrestlebox" challenge ... **Robert Royale** & **Roger Blade** defeated **Eric Draven** & **Nic Noble** ... **Fudd** beat **Marcus** and **Dez** in a three-way dance ... Mid-America champion **Kliff Hanger** pinned **J.T. Stone** ... **Jamie Morrison** defeated **Chris Blayze** ... **Billy Maverick** beat **K-Lo** by disqualification ... **Fat** & **Furious** beat **Luscious Loco**, **Eric Draven**, & **Nic Noble**.
(10-08-05)

—Shawn Sands

HAMMOND—IWA Mid-South Ted Petty Invitational (day two) at the National Guard Armory: ***Second-round matches***: **Kevin Steen** defeated **Brad Bradley** ... **Mike Quackenbush** defeated **Skayde** ... **Chris Sabin** beat **Josh Abercrombie** ... **Matt Sydal** beat **Tyler Black** ... **Arik Cannon** defeated **Delirious** ... **Chris Hero** defeated **American Dragon** ... ***Semifinal matches***: **Kevin Steen** defeated **Mike Quackenbush** ... **Matt Sydal** defeated **Chris Sabin** ... **Arik Cannon** defeated **Chris Hero** ... ***Finals***: **Matt Sydal** defeated **Kevin Steen** and **Arik Cannon** to win the tournament ... ***In non-tournament matches***: Heavyweight champion **Jimmy Jacobs** beat **Mickey Knuckles** ... **Marek Brave** defeated **Trik Davis** ... Tag team champions **Vito** & **Sal Thomaselli** defeated **Tank** & **Rainman** ... **Super Dragon**, **Claudio Castagnoli**, **Alex Shelley**, & **Joey Ryan** defeated **Nate Webb**, **El Generico**, **Puma**, & **Brandon Thomaselli**.
(09-25-05)

—Wayne McCarty

HAMMOND—IWA Mid-South Ted Petty Invitational (day one) at the National Guard Armory: ***First-round matches***: **Kevin Steen** defeated **Nate Webb** ... **Josh Abercrombie** beat **James Gibson** ... **Brad Bradley** defeated **Tank** ... **Mike Quackenbush** beat **Alex Shelley** ... **Arik Cannon** defeated **Joey Ryan** ... **Skayde** beat **Puma** ... **Chris Hero** beat **Rainman** ... **Tyler Black** defeated **Sal Thomaselli** ... **Chris Sabin** beat **Marek Brave** ... **Matt Sydal** defeated **El Generico** ... **Delirious** beat **Brandon Thomaselli** ... **American Dragon** beat **Claudio Castagnoli** by submission ... ***In non-tournament matches***: Heavyweight champion **Jimmy Jacobs** defeated **Colt Cabana**.
(09-24-05)

—Wayne McCarty

KENTUCKY

STEARNS—Southern Wrestling Alliance at McCreary Central High School: **Dan Richards** pinned **Scotty McKeever** ... **Da Studd** wrestled **Wild Willy D** to a no-contest ... **Dan Richards** & **Wild Willy D** defeated **Da Studd** ... **The Omen** won a battle royal.
(10-08-05)

—Paul Ledbetter

That's textbook execution of a hiptoss by Josh Daniels against Andrew Ryker. It was great execution like that that earned him a win over Ryker.

LOUISVILLE—Ohio Valley Wrestling at the Davis Arena: **Brent Albright** pinned **C.M. Punk** ... **Chet the Jett** pinned **Kasey James** ... **Chris Cage** pinned **Tank Toland** ... **Deuce Shade** & **The Riggs Brothers** defeated **Aaron Stevens**, **Paul Birchill**, & **Fury** ... **The Heartbreakers** defeated **M-N-M** ... ... **Bobby Lashley** & **Seven** defeated **Johnny Jeter** & **Da Beast**.
(10-01-05)

—Frank Miller

RUSSELL SPRINGS—Bad 2 The Bone Wrestling at Russell County Middle School: **Billy Black** pinned **K-Lo** ... **Brent Goodin** beat **Maxx Mizery** ... **J.C. Bailey** pinned **Simon Sezz** ... Tag team champs **K-Lo** & **Randy Royal** defeated **Billy Maverick** & **Billy Black** ... Heavyweight champion **Vic the Bruiser** beat **Todd Morton** by disqualification.
(10-01-05)

—Bret Morris

GLENSBORO—SRW Pro Wrestling at Salt River Landing: **Big Gunn** pinned **Hot Rod** ... **Johnny Bad** beat **Daddy Dalton** by disqualification ... **Cujo** defeated **Brian Lawless** ... **Average White Guy** pinned **Kliff Hanger** ... **Billy Maverick** beat **The Prophet** ... **Kevin Star** defeated U.S. champion **Hamid Jihad** to win the title.
(09-30-05)

—Michael De Bennedetto

ELIZABETHTOWN—Bad 2 The Bone Wrestling at the National Guard Armory: Light heavyweight champion **J.C. Bailey** defeated **Simon Sezz**

Two Combat Zone Wrestling champions got hardcore in their double-tables match. Here it's junior heavyweight champ Derek Frazier about to give heavyweight champ Ruckus a mouthful of table via a piledriver.

... **Todd Morton** wrestled to a no-contest with **Andre Justice** ... **Ox Harley** pinned **The Prophet** ... Tag team champions **Randy Royal** & **K-Lo** wrestled to a no-contest with **Billy Black** & **Billy Maverick**. As a result, the title was held up ... Heavyweight champion **The Bruiser** defeated **Real Sexxxy** by disqualification.
(09-24-05)

—Joe Bailey

LOUISIANA

MONROE—WWE at the Civic Center: Raw tag team champions **The Hurricane** & **Rosey** defeated **Lance Cade** & **Trevor Murdoch** ... **The Freakin' Deacon** pinned **Mike Mizanin** ... **Rob Conway** pinned **Eugene** ... **Chris Masters** defeated **Viscera** ... **Shelton Benjamin** pinned **Kerwin White** ... **The Big Show** pinned **Gene Snitsky** ... **Ashley Massaro** & **Trish Stratus** defeated **Torrie Wilson** & **Victoria** ... **Edge** defeated **Matt Hardy** ... WWE champion **John Cena** beat **Kurt Angle** & **Tyson Tomko** in a handicap match.
(09-11-05)

—Jeff Mattiko

MASSACHUSETTS

NEW BEDFORD—Top Rope Promotions at the Top Rope Arena: **Scott Ashworth** pinned **Ryan Waters** ... **The Widowmaker** beat **Freight Train** ... **Stryker** defeated **The Texas Outlaw** ... YPW interstate champion **Brickhouse Baker** pinned YPW heavyweight champion **Huey McGraw** (neither title was on the line) ... **Johnny Angel** beat **Rob Hagan** ... SCCW heavyweight champion **Vain** defeated **Don Vega**.
(10-08-05)

—Shawn O'Domski

LOWELL—Chaotic Wrestling at the Polish-American Veterans Club: Tag team champions **Bryan** & **Matt Logan** defeated **Fred Sampson** & **Craig Stratton** ... **Brian Milonas** defeated **Luis Ortiz** ... **Chase Del Monte** defeated New England champion **Thomas Penmanship** by countout ... **Mike Kruel** defeated **Dan McGuire**, **Psycho**, and **John Walters** in a gauntlet match ... Heavyweight champion **Handsome Johnny** defeated **Max Bauer** ... **Steven Richards** defeated **Arch Kincaid** in a hardcore match.
(09-30-05)

—Rich Palladino

LYNN—Millennium Wrestling Federation/AWA New England at the Armory: Tag team champions **Beau Douglas** & **Todd Hansen** defeated **The Canadian Sensations** ... **Tiger Mulligan** beat **Nocturne** ... **The Outpatient** defeated **Paulie Gilmore** ... **Louis Ortiz** beat heavyweight champion **Dylan Cage** by disqualification in a lumberjack match ... **Jon Thornhill** defeated **Leo Venus** ... **Tiger Mulligan** wrestled to a double-countout with **Jimmy Jact Cash** ... **Osirus** wrestled to a time-limit draw with **Nick Narcisstic** ... **Gino Martino** defeated **Kamala** in a "King Of The Jungle" death match to win the AWA brass knuckles title.
(09-24-05)

—Brad Hutton

MISSISSIPPI

MAGEE—NWA Battlezone at the Battlezone Arena: ... **The Enhancement Kid** defeated **Shea Crosby** in a mask vs. hair match ... **The Minataur** defeated **Ron Horn** ... **Stagger Lee** defeated **Calvin Rose** ... **Skillet the Clown** defeated **Rondale Roosevelt** by disqualification ... **Malek Avalon** wrestled **Mike Carter** to a double-countout ... **Southern Executioner** & **The Faroh of Phunk** defeated **Rick Morgan** & **The Psycho**.
(10-01-05)

—Gerry Burgess

MISSOURI

ELDON—World League Wrestling at the Community Center: **Ty Dalton** defeated **Dino Blade** ... **Keith Walker** defeated **Kenny Omega** ... **Denti Moore** & **Johnny** defeated **Kurt Bar** & **Mentallo** ... **Daniel Cross** defeated **Jay Jackson** ... **Superstar Steve** & **Jason Bates** defeated **Dakota** & **KENTA** ... **Kenta Kobashi** defeated **Wade Chism**.
(09-24-05)

—Raymond Cromley

SPRINGFIELD—WWE at the Shrine Mosque: **Psicosis** & **Super Crazy** defeated **Paul Birchill** & **William Regal** ... **Ken Kennedy** pinned **Scotty Too Hotty** ... Cruiserweight champion **Nunzio** pinned **Spanky** ... Smackdown tag team champions **Road Warrior Animal** & **Heidenreich** beat **Joey Mercury** & **Johnny Nitro** ... **Randy Orton** pinned **Booker T** ... U.S. champion **Chris Benoit** defeated **John Bradshaw Layfield** ... World champion **Batista** pinned **Eddie Guerrero**.
(09-11-05)

—Harry Alliston

NEW YORK

NEW YORK—Ring of Honor at the New Yorker Hotel's Grand Ballroom: **Claudio Castagnoli** beat **Colt Cabana** ... **Christopher Daniels** defeated **Matt Sydal** and **Azrieal** in a three-way elimination match ... **Sal Rinauro** & **Tony Mamaluke** won the tag team title from **B.J. Whitmer** & **Jimmy Jacobs** ... Pure champion **Nigel McGuinness** pinned **Jay Lethal** ... **Roderick Strong** beat **Jimmy Rave** ... **Jack Evans** defeated **Homicide** ... **James Gibson** pinned **Jimmy Yang** ... **Kenta Kobashi** beat **Samoa Joe**.
(10-01-05)

—Jeremy C. Ford

NORTH CAROLINA

CLYDE—Carolina Championship Wrestling at the Waynesville/Clyde National Guard Armory: **Brad Thomas** beat **Jason Jones** ... **Bobby Houston** & **Mike Lee** beat **Roberto** & **Miguel Gurerreos** ... **Tater Kirby** beat **George South Sr.** ... **Eddie Golden** beat **K.C. Thunder** ... **Greg Valentine** beat **Johnny Eagle** ... **Bobby Eaton** beat **Rick Morton**.
(10-08-05)

—Danny Parris

MOORESVILLE—Exodus Wrestling Alliance at the National Guard Armory: **Jake Manning** defeated **Jimmy Jack Funk Jr.** ... **High Impact** defeated **Bobby Houston** & **Canadian Bulldog** ... **Masked Superstar** defeated heavyweight champion **Jason Jones** to win the title ... **Jay Eagle** defeated **Mark Slain** ... **George South Sr.** defeated **The Masked Assassin**.
(10-04-05)

—Michael Carpenter

BURLINGTON—CWF/AWA Mid-Atlantic at the Carolina Sports Arena: **Kamakazi Kid** & **Xsiris** defeated **Shawn Christian** & **Donnie Dollars** ... **Kid Justice** wrestled **Ultra Dragon** to a time-limit draw ... Mid-Atlantic TV champion **Mitch Conner** pinned **Matty Dee** ... Mid-Atlantic heavyweight champion **Garry Stevens** pinned **Jesse Ortega** ... **Ric Converse** won the fifth annual 30-person CWF Rumble.
(10-01-05)

—Grant Sawyer

HENDERSONVILLE—High Velocity Wrestling at Viper's House of Pain: **McGruff** beat **Cpl. Knight** ... **S.T. Ryker** defeated **Evan Force** ... **Neil Nitro** & **Ryan C.** beat **Dynamite Kid** & **Bryan Austin** ... **Kid Kountry** defeated **David Steel** ... **Justin Destruction** beat **Steve Cronic** ... Flyweight champ **Live Wire** defeated **Kaos** ... **Ken Magnum** & **Sir Jonathan Buffett** beat **Jesse Black** & **Leroy Dudley** ... **Scotty Black** defeated **Shane Austin** ... Heavyweight champ **Viper** beat **Mr. Electricity** in an electrified barbed-wire match.
(09-30-05)

—Pearle Hollis

OHIO

CLEVELAND—Extreme War at the West Park

Party Center: **The Hebrew Hammer** won a 20-man battle royal ... **The Bouncer** defeated **The Hebrew Hammer** ... **Sterling James Keenan**, **Glenn Spectre**, & **Crazy J** defeated **Aero**, **Deviant**, & **Lotus** ... Heavyweight champ **Crawford Kincaid** defeated **The American Dream Eagle** ... **Tack** defeated **Pepper Parks** and **Rory Fox** in a three-way dance ... **2 Phat** defeated **Simply the Best** to win the vacant tag team title ... **Dave Demarco** wrestled **John McChesney** to a no-contest for the vacant coastal title ... **Tommy Dreamer** defeated **J-Rocc** ... **Suicide** defeated **Ronnie Rotten** in an ultimate death match.
(10-08-05)

—Jynelle Engelhardt

OKLAHOMA

TULSA—Tornado Pro Wrestling at Owen Park Recreational Center: **Sexy Bologna** defeated **The Violence Alliance** ... **Timmy J** defeated **Justin Lee** ... **AWOL** beat **Michael Faith** ... **Jon Davis** defeated **Rico Suave** and Oklahoma champion **Anthony Jackson** in a three-way elimination match ... **Draven Cross** defeated **Poo Bear** ... Heavyweight champion **Romero Contreras** defeated light heavyweight champion **The Canadian Red Devil.**
(10-08-05)

—Chris Burnham

SAPULPA—Steel Rage Pro Wrestling at the Boys' & Girls' Club: **Cpl. James Warbois** beat **Beau Dalton** by disqualification ... **Bobby Dalton** defeated **Paul Linam** and **Matt Garza** in a triple threat match ... **Luc Lapointe** defeated **Dexter Hardaway** ... **Mitch Carter** & Boys' & Girls' Club champion **Jack Legacy** defeated **The 918 Boyz** ... **Bobby Burns** defeated **Brandon Bishop** ... **Shane Morbid** defeated heavyweight champion **Harry Sanchez** for the title.
(10-07-05)

—Chris Burnham

OKLAHOMA CITY—WWE Unforgiven pay-per-view at the Ford Center: **Ric Flair** defeated Intercontinental champion **Carlito Caribbean Cool** by submission to win the title ... **Ashley Massaro** & **Trish Stratus** defeated **Torrie Wilson** & **Victoria** ... **The Big Show** pinned **Gene Snitsky** ... **Shelton Benjamin** pinned **Kerwin White** ... **Matt Hardy** pinned **Edge** in a steel cage match ... **Lance Cade** & **Trevor Murdoch** defeated Raw tag team champions **The Hurricane** & **Rosey** to win the title ... **Shawn Michaels** pinned **Chris Masters** ... **Kurt Angle** beat WWE champion **John Cena** by disqualification.
(09-18-05)

—Bill Meltzer

PENNSYLVANIA

GILBERTSVILLE—World Wide Wrestling Alliance at Zern's Farmers Market: **Johnny Law** beat **Ykushi** ... **Molsonn** beat **Night Prowler** ... **New Wave** beat **Arkham** ... **Body Beautiful** beat **Rodney X** ... **Nitro the Dark Priest** beat **Mark Manson** ... Tag champs **Iron Horse Riders** defeated **Bodacious Brad** & **Alex Balboa** ... **Heartbreaker** wrestled **Kage** to a no-contest.
(10-08-05)

—Lizzie Dodd

BLUE RIDGE SUMMIT—Summit Wrestling Association at the Blue Ridge Fire and Rescue Hall: **Massive Mike** beat **Steve the Teacher** ... **Old School** beat **Hal Litzer** & **Grimace** ... **Hyjinx** beat **Nickolas Tide** and **Mr. Olympia** in a triple threat match ... **Billy Johnson** & **Chucky Wynn** won a tag team royal rumble to win the tag team title ... **The Chick Magnets** beat **John Kermon** & **C.A. Elliott** ... **Lance McIntyre** beat **Tank Thomas** ... **Leslie Leatherman** beat **Sean Patrick.**
(10-01-05)

—Mike Proyer

McKEESPORT—NWA Pro Wrestling Express at the Sportatorium: **Devil Bhudakahn** pinned **Dan Miles** ... **The Tri Chi Fraternity** defeated **Armageddon** by disqualification ... Three Rivers champion **Eric Extasy** pinned **Seth James** ... **Da Munchies** defeated **Teddy Fine** & **Sabotage** ... **Paul Atlas** defeated **Daron Smythe** ... Brass knuckles champion **Devin Devine** & **Crusher Hansen** defeated **Bigg** & **Nikita Allanov** ... Heavyweight champion **Scottie Gash** wrestled **Chris Taylor** to a no-contest ... **Quinn Magnum**, **Mad Mike**, **Brandon K**, & **Scottie Gash** wrestled **Crusher Hansen**, **Devin Devine**, **Justin Idol**, & **Chris Taylor** to a no-contest.
(10-01-05)

—Dave Babcock

SOUTH CAROLINA

SPARTANBURG—American Pro Wrestling at the American Coliseum: **Bryan Austin** pinned **Evan Force** ... **Jimmy Kindrid** defeated **Eric Thunder** ... **Sir Jonathan Buffett** beat **The Dark Lion** by disqualification ... **Jason Swords** beat **Kaos** ... **Chief Jay Eagle** defeated **Ken Magnum** ... **Preston Orion** pinned **A.J. Frost** ... **Dookie** & **Boomer Payne** defeated **Doug Hawkins** & **Bill White** ... **Mickey Richards** beat **Steve Cronic** by disqualification ... **Morbid** defeated **Shea McGrady** ... Heavyweight champion **Mark Slain** defeated **Don Matthews** ... **Nick Fury** won a three-way match against **Rowdy James** and **Zack Salvation** to win the Carolinas title.
(10-01-05)

—Mike Durbin

LANCASTER—New Millennium Championship Wrestling at the American Legion Building: **Money Man** defeated **Crazy Train** ... **Jay Eagle** defeated **Doug Hawkins** ... **Jason Jones** beat **Michael Adryan** ... **Rex Rumble** defeated **Myric Moore** ... TV champion **Andy Chavis** defeated **Lodi** by disqualification ... **Tim Hunter** defeated heavyweight champion **Shane Austin** in a cage match to win the title.
(09-30-05)

—Michael Carpenter

TENNESSEE

McKENZIE—Squared Circle Championship Wrestling Hurricane Katrina Benefit at the Webb School Gym: **El Loco** defeated **BlackBone** ... **Spyder** defeated **J.R. Rich** ... **The P.H.A.T. Boyz** beat **Shannon** & **John Robertson** ... **Tank** defeated **Drago** ... **The Albino Rhino** defeated **Billy Ray Dudley** ... **Weasel** defeated **Steven Rampage** to become the new Southern heavyweight champion ... **Brimstone** defeated **Leroy Boi**.
(09-30-05)

—Carter Brady

TEXAS

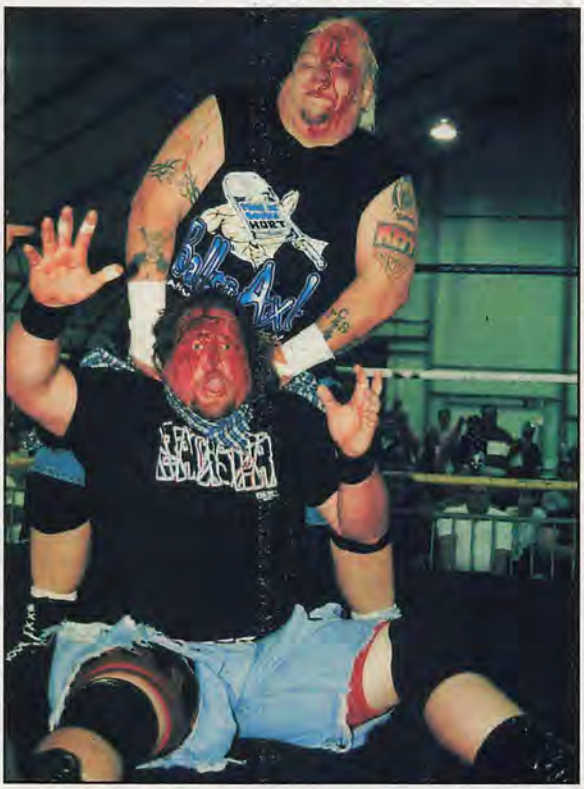
HOUSTON—WWE No Mercy pay-per-view at the Toyota Center: **Road Warrior Animal**, **Heidenreich**, & **Christy Hemme** defeated **Joey Mercury**, **Johnny Nitro**, & **Melina** when Hemme pinned Melina ... **Bobby Lashley** pinned **Simon Dean** ... U.S. champion **Chris Benoit** defeated **Booker T**, **Christian**, and **Orlando Jordan** in a four-way match when he forced Christian to tap out ... **Ken Kennedy** pinned **Hardcore Holly** ... **John Bradshaw Layfield** pinned **Rey Misterio Jr.** ... **Randy** & **Bob Orton Jr.** beat **The Undertaker** in a handicap casket match ... **Juventud Guerrera** pinned cruiserweight champion **Nunzio** to win the title ... World champion **Batista** pinned **Eddie Guerrero.**
(10-09-05)

—Frank Krewda

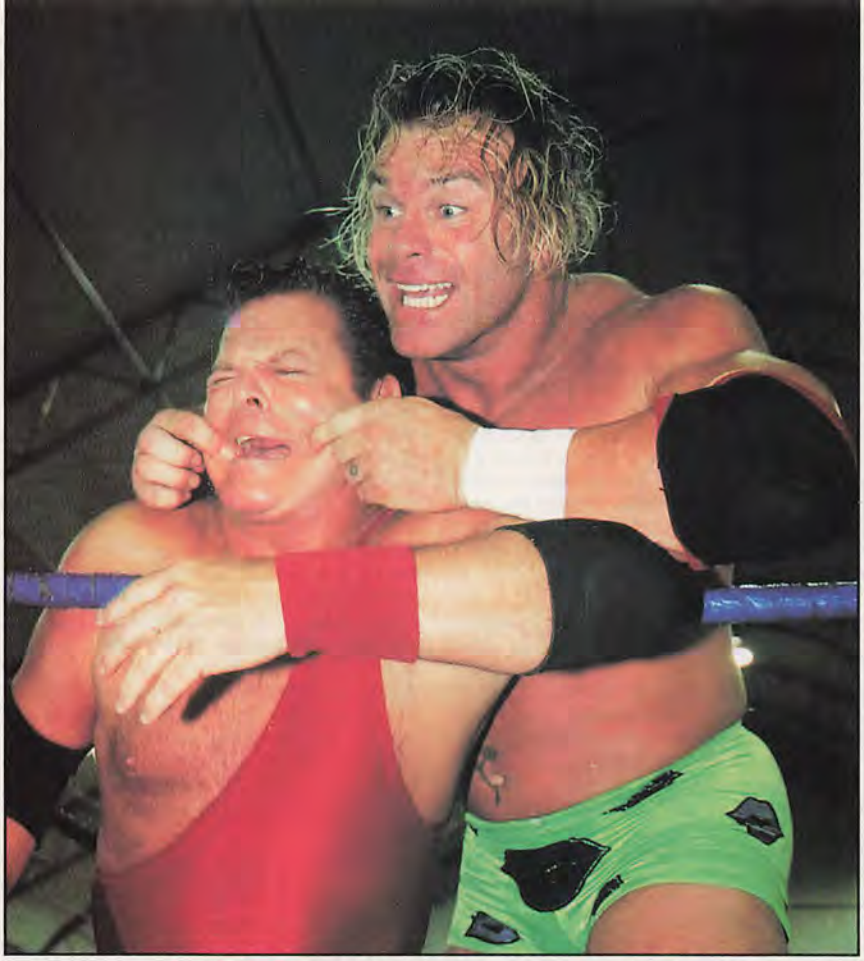
ARLINGTON—Professional Championship Wrestling at the PCW Arena: Cruiserweight champ **James Johnson** beat **J.T. Lamotta** ... **The Bluechippers** beat **The Dark Circle**, **The Elite**, and **Stephen Murphy** & **Kevin Paine** in an elimination match to win the tag team belts ... **Jeremy Young** beat **Slam Shady** ... **Claudia** beat **Robert Evans** and **King Richard** in a three-way flag match ... **Wally Darkmon** beat **Dave Dunnings** ... **Action Jackson** beat **Luke Bronson** ... **Steve DeMarco** & **Mace Malone** beat **Tim Storm** & **Shadow** ... **Young Pioneer Eagle** beat **Thomas Bussey.**
(10-08-05)

—Rob Moore

HIDALGO—WWE at the Dodge Arena: **Viscera** pinned **Tyson Tomko** ... **Rob Conway** pinned **Eugene** ... Raw tag team champions **Lance Cade**



If you didn't know better, you might think this was hardcore warrior Axl Rotten taking on "brother" Ian as they revisited their *PWI* Feud of the Year from a decade ago. Actually, it's The Bruiser.



A little TNA vs. WWE in Maryland! TNA's Kip James made sure that Jerry Lawler smiled pretty for the ringside photographers. WWE would come back to win, however.

& **Trevor Murdoch** defeated **The Hurricane** & **Rosey** ... **Gene Snitsky** pinned **Tajiri** ... **Shelton Benjamin** pinned **Carlito Caribbean Cool** ... **The Big Show** beat **Edge** ... **Trish Stratus** pinned **Torrie Wilson** ... **Shawn Michaels** pinned **Chris Masters** ... WWE champion **John Cena** defeated **Kurt Angle** by disqualification.
(10-08-05)

—Patrick Harmon

DENTON—XCW at the XCW Arena: **Spudz** beat **Bull** ... **Action Jackson** beat **Darin Childs** ... **Jacob Ladder** beat **Hugh Rogue** ... Tag champs **Jeff** & **Jerry Brown** beat **Sidd** by disqualification ... **Jack Drastic** beat **Jared Steele** to win the TNT belt ... **Al Jackson** beat heavyweight champion **Kit Carson** to win the title.
(10-07-05)

—Melanie Reed

SAN ANTONIO—TWE at Trishway Entertainment Center: **Big Dogg** beat **Darin Childs** ... **Skitzo** defeated **Quinton Allen** ... **Brett Thunder** beat **Spector** ... **Brett Thunder** beat **Skitzo** ... **Milano Collection A.T.** beat **Brett Thunder** ... **Rudy Boy Gonzalez** beat **Jacob Ladder** in a last-man-standing match.
(10-02-05)

—Connie Burns

FORT WORTH—New Generation of Wrestling at the Fire Station Community Center: **Texas Red** & **King Richard** defeated **Treyman** & **Chris Richter** ... **Alvin Breaux** pinned **The Mexican Giant** ... **Jazz** beat **Alexandria** ... **MACE** pinned **Jason Black** ... **S.W.A.T.** defeated **Oscar Herrera** & **The Angel of Sin** ... **Rodney Mack**, **MACE**, heavyweight champion **Blade**, and **Frankie Fisher** defeated **The New Age Cowboys** and **Pendragon** in a falls-count-anywhere, no-disqualification match.
(10-01-05)

—Travis McKeon

ODESSA—WWE at the Ector County Coliseum: **Ashley Massaro** & **Trish Stratus** defeated **Victoria**, **Candice Michelle**, & **Torrie Wilson** in a handicap match ... **Rob Conway** beat **Eugene** ... **Chris Masters** beat **Viscera** ... **Kerwin White** pinned **Shelton Benjamin** ... Intercontinental champion **Ric Flair** beat **Carlito Caribbean Cool** ... Raw tag team champions **Lance Cade** & **Trevor Murdoch** beat **Rosey** in a handicap match ... **The Big Show** pinned **Edge** ... WWE champion **John Cena** defeated **Kurt Angle** by disqualification.
(10-01-05)

—Hollis Richardson

EL PASO—WWE at the Don Haskins Center: **Ashley Massaro** & **Trish Stratus** defeated **Candice Michelle**, **Torrie Wilson**, & **Victoria** in a handicap match ... **Rob Conway** pinned **Eugene** ... **Chris Masters** beat **Viscera** ... **Kerwin White** pinned **Shelton Benjamin** ... Intercontinental champion **Ric Flair** defeated **Carlito Caribbean Cool** ... Raw tag team champions **Lance Cade** & **Trevor Murdoch** beat **Rosey** in a handicap match ... **The Big Show** pinned **Edge** ... WWE champion **John Cena** defeated **Kurt Angle** by disqualification.
(09-30-05)

—Francisco Corrales

EL PASO—Lucha Caliente at the Caliente Dome: **Damian Demarco** beat **Don Juan** ... **Mayor** beat **El Latino** ... **Green Danger** & **Punisher** beat **Contacto** & **Nathan Sin** ... **Jacob Ladder** & **Darin Childs** beat **The T Krew** ... **Los Escorpios** beat **Cinta De Oro** & **Chucky** ... **Cassandro** beat **Hurricane Hector**.
(09-29-05)

—Sandy Martin

AMARILLO—WWE at the Coliseum: **Psicosis** & **Super Crazy** defeated **Paul Birchill** & **William Regal** ... **Bobby Lashley** pinned **Simon Dean** ... Cruiserweight champion **Nunzio** defeated **Paul London**, **Juventud Guerrera**, and **Spanky** in a four-way elimination match ... **Ken Kennedy** beat **Hardcore Holly** ... U.S. champion **Chris Benoit** defeated **Randy Orton** by disqualification ... Smackdown tag team champions **Road Warrior Animal** & **Heidenreich** defeated **Joey Mercury** & **Johnny Nitro** ... **Eddie Guerrero** beat **Rey Misterio Jr.** in a streetfight ... World champion **Batista** pinned **John Bradshaw Layfield**.
(09-19-05)

—Arthur Robbins

WEST VIRGINIA

NITRO—Xtreme Maximum Championship Wrestling at the Community Center: **Shane Storm** and **X.5** wrestled to a no-contest ... **American Idols** defeated **Raw Talent** & **Cole Cash** ... **Ace Prime** defeated **Eric Steel** ... **Unholy** defeated **Smokey C** by disqualification ... Tag team champions **The Lynch Brothers** defeated **T-Bone** & **Max Rock** ... **Shane Storm** defeated **X.5** in a falls-count-anywhere match ... **Devin Davis** beat Xtreme Independent champion **Flash** by disqualification ... **Cuban Assassin** defeated **Chad Cross** ... Heavyweight champion **Kris King** & **Flex Tolley** defeated **Kris Kavanaugh** & **Sexbomb Cholo**.
(10-08-05)

—Monty Combs

RED JACKET—Powerslam Wrestling at the Community Center: **Ice** defeated **Dan Richards** ... **Kris King** beat **Brian Compton** ... **Rick Morton** defeated **Scotty McKeever** ... **Jowad Wayne** beat **Beau James** ... **Brad Thomas** defeated **Shane Matthews** ... **Eric Darkstorm** & **Aaron Draven** won a three-way tag team match against **The Hawaiian Heartthrobs** and **Chance Prophet** & **The Juggulator**.
(10-06-05)

—Fay Ferguson

WISCONSIN

RADISSON—National Federation of Wrestling at the Community Center: **Paul B. Onion** beat **Major Chaos** ... **Karnage** beat **Shinobi** in a no-holds-barred match ... **Buddah** beat **Johnny Goldengate** ... **Darkchild** beat **The Lumberjack** ... **Ian Xavier** beat **Jay Chaotic** ... **Ian Xavier** won a battle royal.
(10-01-05)

—Nicholas Loken

INTERNATIONAL

AUSTRALIA

SYDNEY—World Series Wrestling at the Olympic Park Sports Centre: **TNT** defeated **Frankie Kazarian** and **Super Dragon** in a three-way match ... **Samoa Joe** beat **Andrew Martin** ... **Nathan Jones** defeated **Mark Hilton** ... **Christopher Daniels** defeated **A.J. Styles** ... **Gail Kim** defeated **Nidia** by submission ... **Team 3D** beat **Jesus** & **Lee Starr** ... **Rhino** pinned **Jeff Jarrett**.
(10-07-05)

—Pat Harrington

2 MAGAZINES IN 1!
THE WRESTLER/INSIDE WRESTLING

Okay, it was an experiment. We took a gamble. Nobody had ever thought of binding two magazines, back cover to back cover, and selling them as one package. It wouldn't have worked with most magazines, but *The Wrestler* and *Inside Wrestling* have been so closely associated for the last 40 years, we thought it just might work. Well, it did! Reader response has been overwhelmingly positive. So if you missed the 164-page combination issues we've published so far, here's a chance to order them.

Vol. 1, 2004:

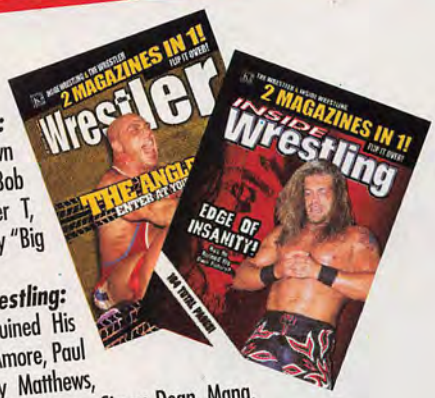
Cover Story—*The Wrestler:* "The Billion-Dollar Reason Triple-H Was Traded Back To Raw!" **60-Minute Interview:** Rick Steamboat. **Also Inside:** Trish-Christian, Ring of Honor, Raw vs. Smackdown, Super 8.

Cover Story—*Inside Wrestling:* "The Dead Man's Last Will: What The Undertaker Must Do Before He Deep-Sixes His Career." **Also Inside:** Paul Heyman, Orton-Foley, Jackie-Rico, Johnny Nitro, Sylvester Terkay, Jillian Hall, Akio & Sakoda, Garrison Cade, Matt Cappotelli, the Bashams, Sonny Siaki, Sonjay Dutt.

Vol. 2, 2005:

Cover Story—*The Wrestler:* "The Angle Zone: Enter At Your Own Risk!" **60-Minute Interview:** Bob Orton Jr. **Also Inside:** Booker T, Michaels-Christian, A.J. Styles, Ray "Big Bossman" Traylor.

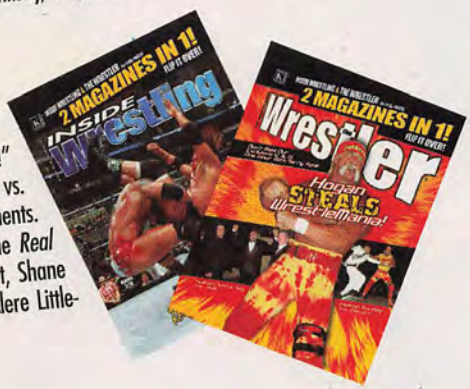
Cover Story—*Inside Wrestling:* "Edge Of Insanity! Has He Ruined His Future?" **Also Inside:** Scott D'Amore, Paul London, Orlando Jordan, Joey Matthews, Kim Neilson, Kenny Bolin, Dunn & Marcos, Simon Dean, Mana, Kane-Snitsky, Magnus & Daivari, Pat Kenney.



Vol. 3, 2005:

Cover Story—*The Wrestler:* "Hogan Steals WrestleMania!" **60-Minute Interview:** Terry Funk. **Also Inside:** Cornette vs. Heenan, Petey Williams, 10 unforgettable WrestleMania moments.

Cover Story—*Inside Wrestling:* "WrestleMania 21: The *Real* Winners & Losers." **Also Inside:** Alexis Laree, Lance Hoyt, Shane Twins, Jack Evans, Val Venis, Arch Kincaid, Mike Mondo, Alere Littlefeather, Jeff Hammond, O.C. Boyz, Shawn Michaels.



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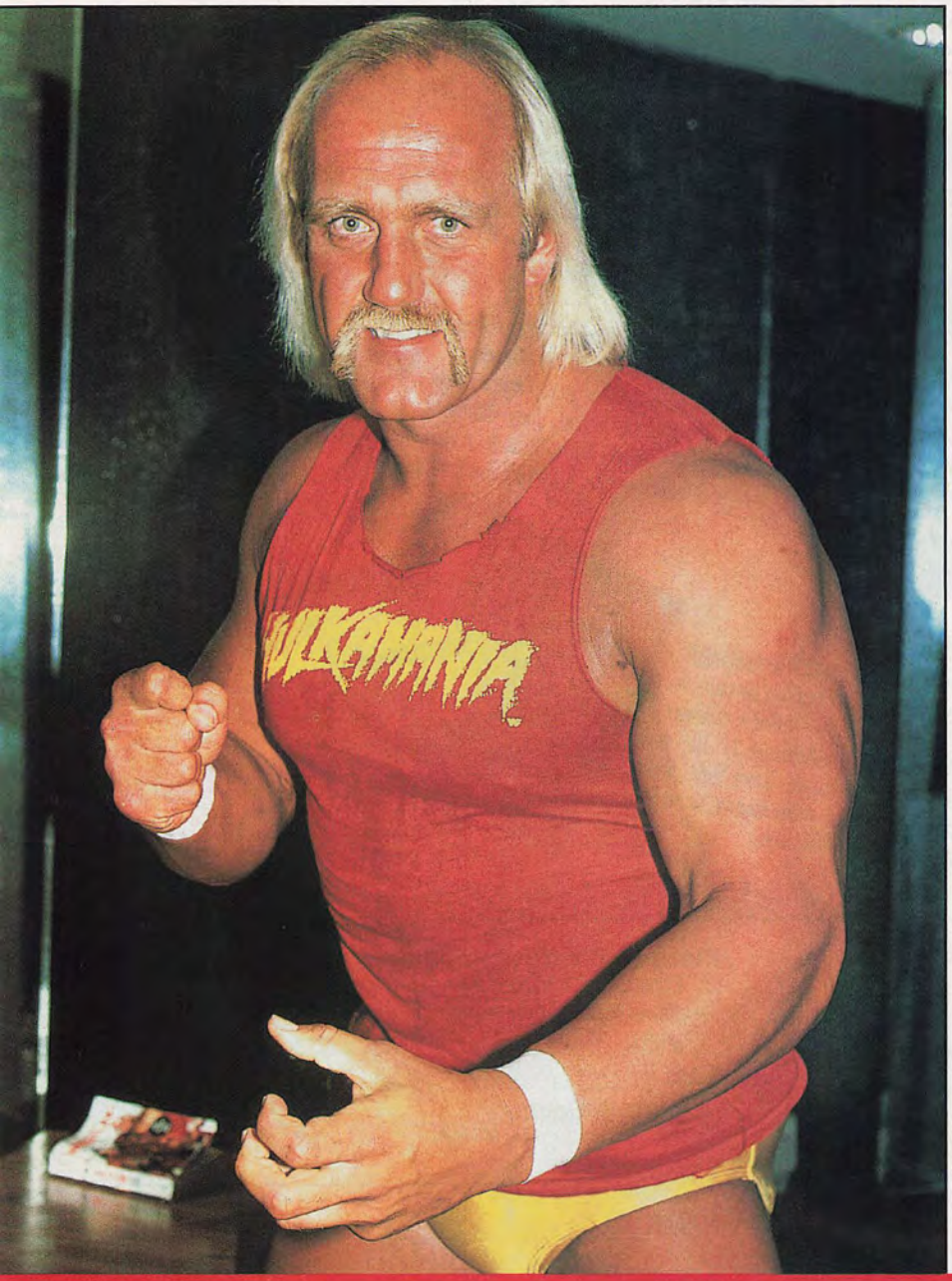
PWI classic

From the May 1989 issue of *Inside Wrestling*



HULK HOGAN ADMITS: "I Love Elizabeth!"*

Randy Savage loves Elizabeth. Hulk Hogan loves Elizabeth, too, although not in the way the "Macho Man" thinks he loves her. This misunderstanding between the WWF's two most popular wrestlers has caused an unmendable rift—and it's about to erupt into one of the greatest feuds ever!

HOW RANDY SAVAGE PERCEIVES HULK HOGAN

(A two-line play)

(The scene is an arena in Huntsville, Alabama. There is a large crowd of fans watching as a tall, muscular man with long hair, balding near the front, stands on a platform with a beautiful brunette, his manager. He has a look of intensity on his face and shows great interest as he listens to a conversation between two men—Hulk

*"Like A Sister"

Hogan and Brother Love—who are standing beside him. There is tremendous tension and emotion in their steadily rising voices.)

BROTHER LOVE: There is no love in the air between Hulk Hogan, Randy Savage, and Elizabeth.

HULK HOGAN: I love Elizabeth ...

(Fade to black.)

* * *

Paranoia, thy name is Randy "Macho Man" Savage. Insensitivity, thy name is Hulk Hogan. How else can one explain the bad feelings that have surfaced between the WWF World champion and the former champion over the past several months?

Savage, a jealous man who is protective of his lovely manager, Elizabeth, hears only what he wants to hear. When Hogan said, "I love Elizabeth like a sister," all Savage's jealous ears heard was, "I love Elizabeth." The rest was just a blur. By the time Hogan said "like a sister," Savge was already in another world, plotting ways to stave off this perceived "threat" to what he considers his very own.

Elizabeth was honored to accompany her man, WWF World champ Randy Savage, wherever he went (above). She also liked seconding her close friend Hulk Hogan (below), however. That caused problems.

But don't hold Hogan blameless. It doesn't take much perception to realize that Savage is jealous and must be handled with kid gloves when dealing with Elizabeth. Is it really necessary for Hogan to kiss and hug Elizabeth and lift her upon his shoulders? Is it really necessary for him to bring her to ringside for his matches? The "Hulkster" always got along well without her.

It would've been so easy for Hogan, Savage, and Elizabeth to co-exist peacefully. They could've been one of the greatest alliances ever, a tag team too powerful to overcome, each man feeding off the other's encouragement in singles matches. But immaturity has torn them apart, and they have nobody to blame but themselves.

Inside Wrestling ratings

May 1989

WWF

World champion: Randy Savage

1. The Ultimate Warrior
2. Big Bossman
3. Hulk Hogan
4. Akeem
5. Greg Valentine
6. Bad News Brown
7. Andre the Giant
8. Hacksaw Duggan
9. Curt Hennig
10. Big John Studd

NWA

World champion: Ric Flair

1. Barry Windham
2. Rick Steamboat
3. Sting
4. Eddie Gilbert
5. Rick Steiner
6. Lex Luger
7. Junkyard Dog
8. Mike Rotundo
9. Michael Hayes
10. Butch Reed

TAG TEAMS

1. The Road Warriors
2. Demolition
3. Stan Lane & Bobby Eaton
4. The Warlord & The Barbarian
5. Pat Tanaka & Paul Diamond
6. Steve Williams & Kevin Sullivan
7. The Samoan Swat Team
8. Dennis Condrey & Randy Rose
9. Robert Fuller & Jimmy Golden
10. Tully Blanchard & Arn Anderson

MOST POPULAR

1. Hulk Hogan
2. Randy Savage
3. Sting
4. The Ultimate Warrior
5. Rick Steiner
6. Lex Luger
7. Rick Steamboat
8. Hacksaw Duggan
9. Dusty Rhodes
10. Kerry Von Erich

MOST HATED

1. Big Bossman
2. Ric Flair
3. Barry Windham
4. Akeem
5. Andre the Giant
6. Mike Rotundo
7. Steve Williams
8. Bad News Brown
9. Rick Morton
10. Iceman Parsons

Even when all three parties were celebrating a big win together, it wasn't hard to see that the "Macho Man" wasn't happy about Hogan's relationship with Liz.

The only faultless person in this situation is Elizabeth. She has handled a difficult problem with poise, grace, and diplomacy. When asked before the Royal Rumble whom she would root for if Hogan and Savage squared off, Elizabeth said, "I'm hoping that doesn't happen." When it did happen, Elizabeth quickly ran into the ring and defused an explosive crisis.

When Hogan asks her for a kiss, she offers him a friendly peck on the cheek while making it clear that her true feelings are for Savage. When Savage is in trouble, she calls for Hogan. When Hogan is in trouble, she calls for Savage. Caught in the middle—a situation a woman with Elizabeth's beauty has most likely been in many times before—she has done everything possible to keep The Megapowers together.

The ironic part of this is that Hogan's love for Elizabeth *is* purely innocent. Hogan is married with a year-old baby girl. He is very happy with the lifestyle he leads outside the ring and has no desire to destroy it by having a messy—and public—affair with Elizabeth. Of course, Hogan is an outgoing person. He likes to display his emotions and show his affection for others. Thus, his actions toward Elizabeth can be—and often

As expected, the hard feelings that didn't have to be so hard between Savage and Hogan grew into an explosive feud within months.

are—wrongly perceived when no slight is intended.

Savage has always been overprotective of Elizabeth. Several times, he nearly came to blows with George Steele because "The Animal" was making advances on Elizabeth. But only a paranoid individual like Savage would see the neanderthalic Steele as a threat. Could you imagine Steele and Elizabeth walking into a fancy restaurant, arm-in-arm, and sharing an intimate, candlelight dinner? It's preposterous!

Elizabeth loves Savage. That has always been clear. She will do anything to help him and would do nothing to hurt him. She is, however, caught between two men who are acting like spoiled boys. Savage refuses to realize that Ho-gan is a friend and means no harm. Hogan refuses to realize that Savage is insanely jealous and paranoid.

Maybe The Megapowers' alliance was never meant to be.

Indeed, when explosive personalities get together, it is almost inevitable that there will be trouble. Consider the New York Yankees in the mid- to late-1970s. They were successful, but there was always trouble brewing. And that's what's happening in the WWF. There are two remarkably strong personalities at conflict, two very different kinds of people. It's arguable, in fact, that things were more natural for Hogan and Savage when they were going *against* each other.

Well, now it's going to happen again. Ironically, the wrestling world will benefit from this war. It promises to be an outstanding battle and will capture the imagination of millions of viewers. But is it necessary? Did it have to happen? Couldn't these two men just get along without feuding?

Didn't Savage hear what Hogan was saying? Didn't Hogan realize what Savage was hearing?

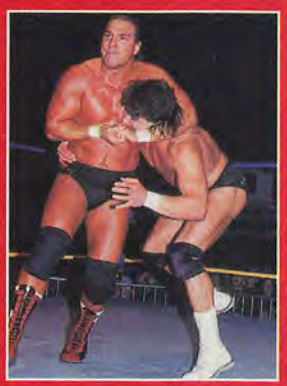
This is a wrestling tragedy—one that promises to be played out in more than one act. □

Inside Wrestling, May 1989

The cover: Hulk Hogan and Elizabeth got most of the cover, but also teased was a story in which Sting claimed to have taken "all the fight out of Ric Flair." The "Stinger" argued that Flair hadn't been the same mentally or emotionally since he held him to a 45-minute draw on national TV in 1988. He said that if Rick Steamboat were to beat Flair for the NWA World title, he should get some credit. Just weeks after the issue went to press, "The Dragon" did unseat Flair. But there was some fight left in the "Nature Boy."

The American Dogfaced Gremlin?: We probably surprised a few people with the headline "Rick Steiner: Wrestling's New Dusty Rhodes!" Maybe that turned out to be a bit of a stretch. The story noted that Steiner was following the same basic career path that Dusty followed and having the same polarizing effect on the NWA. With Dusty having left the NWA, it appeared Steiner might be the man to fill the void. Yes, probably more than a bit of a stretch on our part.

Bad Company, Bad Mood: Why were Pat Tanaka and Paul Diamond—Bad Company—and manager Dallas Page so irate? They had been AWA World tag team champs for nearly a year, but they were anything but happy. The reasons: They weren't getting enough matches (and thus not enough money) and weren't getting the kind of matches they wanted. Their solution: They drew up a series of mostly ridiculous demands and presented it to AWA President Stanley Blackburn. Blackburn's response: He chuckled and tossed the list in the garbage.



Rooster Cries Fowl: Even now, nearly two full decades after the fact, Terry Taylor hasn't lived down the fact that he used to wrestle in the WWF as The Red Rooster (with a portion of his hair dyed red and sticking straight up), one of the all-time worst gimmicks. We documented how miserable he was during that time, especially when his own manager, Bobby Heenan, was constantly chastising him. We expected much better results when he finally dumped Heenan and became "himself" again.

Ornery Morton: Rick Morton of The Rock 'n' Roll Express had been one of the most popular stars in the world for years, especially among teenage girls. But he wasn't hearing many cheers after turning bad in the old CWA. Although he denied it when we interviewed him for "Hotseat," it sure looked like he accepted a bribe to help "Dirty" Dutch Mantel beat Jerry Lawler in a key match. He was downright surly in our interview. Good thing he'd be back to the fan favorite side soon.

BACK ISSUES OF the Wrestler®

Don't miss a single issue of the magazine that has thrilled wrestling fans for two generations, THE WRESTLER! Complete your collection of the most respected wrestling publication in the world! Supplies are limited, so don't delay—order today!

May 1979: Paul Jones-Rick Steamboat Feud: Who Is Really To Blame? Also: Valiants, Jack Brisco, Larry Hennig, Johnson-King, Lanza-Mulligan, Chief Jay Strongbow, Snuka-Patera.

Sept. 1980: Why Ernie Ladd Says ... "I'm Tired Of Being Your King." Also: Rick Steamboat, Mad Dog Vachon, Bugsy McGraw, Patera-Patterson, Manny Fernandez, Bob Backlund, Greg Gagne, Mike Sharpe.

Feb. 1981: Larry Zbyszko's Claim: "Tony Garea Begged Me Not To Hurt Him!" Also: The Grappler, Race-Patera, Hussein Arab, Humperdink-Rhodes, Gilberts, Mr. Wrestling II, Bravo-Bockwinkel.

June 1981: Bruno Sammartino: "I Want To Break Stan Hansen's Neck!" Also: Ted DiBiase, Garea & Martel, Mike Graham, Mongolian Stomper, Piper-Superstar, Verne Gagne, Tommy Rich.

Oct. 1981: Is The Funk Family At War? Why Terry Funk And Dory Funk Jr. Were Forced To Wrestle. Also: Backlund-Patterson-Mosca, Harley Race, Rhodes-Khan, Kevin Sullivan, Flair-Patera, Verne Gagne.

Aug. 1982: Nick Bockwinkel: "Tommy Rich Is Too Stupid To Be Champion!" Also: Putski-Adonis, Blackjack Mulligan Jr., Roddy Piper, Rick Steamboat, Lawler-Kaufman, Mike Graham.

April 1982: How Jack Brisco Controls Ric Flair's Championship Destiny. Also: Tito Santana, Valentine-Atlas, Bob Roop, Armstrongs, John Studd, Eric Embry.

May 1982: Bob Backlund's Fourth Anniversary As WWF Champion: The All-American Boy Grows Up. Also: Koloff-Rich, Superstar Graham, David Von Erich, Putski-Morales, Dusty Rhodes.

June 1982: Ric Flair vs. Rick Steamboat: How The NWA Belt Strangled Wrestling's Greatest Friendship. Also: Piper-Armstrong, Hussein Arab, Bruno Sammartino, Adonis & Ventura, Butch Reed.

July 1982: Harley Race—His Destiny Is In The Hands Of Tommy Rich. Also: Rick Steamboat, Chief Jay Strongbow, Buzz Sawyer, Ric Flair, Roddy Piper.

Sept. 1982: Dusty Rhodes Returns To Florida: The Tragic Comeback That Should Not Have Happened. Also: Manny Fernandez, Armstrong-Piper, Blassie-Mulligan, Japan, Bockwinkel-Hogan.

Nov. 1982: Clash Of The Titans—Backlund vs. Flair: Who's Better? Also: Roddy Piper, Gagne & Brunzell, Putski & Snuka, Brian Blair.

Dec. 1982: Morales vs. Snuka: Does Pedro Deserve To Be Intercontinental Champion? Also: Bob Orton Jr., Kamala, Rich & Rhodes, Barry Windham, Ted DiBiase, JYD-Bockwinkel, Oliver Humperdink.

Jan. 1983: Ivan Putski Humiliates Cowboy Bob Orton: Can The Grand Wizard Pick Up The Pieces? Also: Barry Windham, Muraco-Sawyer-Rich, Nick Bockwinkel, Flair-Youngblood-Steamboat, Fabulous Kangaroos.

Feb. 1983: Exclusive Coverage: Nick Bockwinkel Regains The AWA Title From Otto Wanz. Also: Backlund-Graham, Rich-Sawyer, Barry Windham, Martel & Garea, McDaniel & Piper, Kamala.

May 1983: What Will Happen When The Samoans Become Too Smart For Capt. Lou Albano? Also: Tommy Rich, Terry Allen, Eddie Gilbert, Kerry-Race, Ladd & Rhodes, Flair-Orndorff.

June 1983: Flair-Windham Match Spurs Controversy: Should The NWA Champion Be Allowed To Choose His Challengers? Also: Ivan Koloff, Bruiser Brody, Kerry Von Erich, Andre-Kamala, Brazil-Valentine, Gagnes-Martel.

July 1983: Ric Flair: "I Wrestle The Men Backlund Is Afraid Of." Also: Putski-Adonis, Kevin Sullivan, Bob Roop, Martel-Heenan.

Sept. 1983: Nick Bockwinkel Forces Hulk Hogan Into Exile: And Only The Fans Can Bring Him Back. Also: Briscos, Blackwell-Kerry-Race, Paul Ellering, Mulligan & Windham.

Nov. 1983: Target—Harley Race! Can Dusty Rhodes Fulfill His American Dream A Third Time? Also: Rick Rude, Rotundo-Kabuki, Gagne & Brunzell, Tito Santana, Von Erichs-Freebirds.

Dec. 1983: The Night The AWA World Title Was Stolen From Mil Mascaras. Also: Roddy Piper, Larry Zbyszko, Dino Bravo, Fabulous Ones, Garvin & Sunshine.

March 1984: Is Tito Santana Trying To Blackmail The WWF? Also: Wayne & Sawyer, Hogan-Race, David Von Erich, Jesse Ventura.

July 1984: Tommy Rich Is Back! And He Owes It All To The Fans. Also: Valiant-Rhodes, Ric Flair, Mike Von Erich, Billy Jack.

Aug. 1984: Garvin vs. Roberts: "Hands Of Stone" Crushes "The Snake." Also: Freebirds-Devastation Inc., Sawyer-Sullivan, Lawler & Dillon, McDaniel-Race.

Nov. 1984: The $50,000 Full-Nelson Challenge Match: Billy Jack Gets Bloody Revenge Against Superstar Graham. Also: Roddy Piper, Heenan & Saito, Brody & Hansen, Kerry Von Erich.

Dec. 1984: The Tully Blanchard-Rick Steamboat Feud: Will Dusty Rhodes End It ... Or Make It Worse? Also: Tito Santana, Martel-Atlas, D. Funk, Mike Von Erich, Williams-Taylor.

Jan. 1985: Kerry Von Erich: "I've Got Ric Flair's NWA Title Within My Grasp." Also: Albano & Lauper, Koloffs & Kernodle, Road Warriors, Lawler & Rude, Scott McGhee.

Feb. 1985: Greg Valentine Wins Tito Santana's Intercontinental Title ... But Does He Deserve To Be Champion? Also: Ronnie Garvin, Warriors-Sheepherders, Flair-Billy Jack, Nikita Koloff.

April 1985: Six-Man Riot! Road Warriors & Ellering vs. Rhodes, Rich, & Anderson. Also: Tonga Kid, tomorrow's stars, Adams-Kevin, Flair-Jack, Terminators.

May 1985: The Road Warriors vs. Dusty Rhodes & Manny Fernandez: Exclusive Coverage Of The Historic Tag Team Superbowl! Also: Al-Kaissie-Gagne, Backlund-Race, Haynes-Kamala, Tito Santana.

June 1985: Are The WWF Rulebreakers Singling Out Barry Windham For Destruction? Also: Zbyszko-Backlund, Rhodes-Blanchard, Tommy Rich, Oliver-Haynes.

July 1985: It's A Dog's Life ... And Junkyard Dog Wouldn't Trade It With Anyone! Also: Backlund-Martel, Kernodle-Koloff, Butch Reed, Hernandez & Sunshine, Mike Graham.

Aug. 1985: Ten Days Of Blood And Glory: The Road Warriors Invade Japan! Also: Terry Taylor, Magnum T.A., Bugsy McGraw, Sheik & Volkoff-Windham & Rotundo, 20th anniversary.

Oct. 1985: David Shultz Gets An NWA Title Shot: Ric Flair—"I Wrestle The Men Hulk Hogan Is Afraid Of!" Also: Misty Blue, Rick Martel, Kendall Windham, George Steele, Killer Brooks, all-time top 10.

May 1986: Von Erich Family Feud: Is Lance Coming Between Kevin And Kerry? Also: Hansen-Hall, Hillbillies-Beefcake & Valentine, Butch Reed, Santana-Ventura.

June 1986: Kerry Reveals His Secret: "I've Told Magnum T.A. How To Beat Ric Flair!" Also: Steve Williams, Hogan-Orton, Flair-Bockwinkel, Lex Luger.

Nov. 1986: Morton & Gibson Take A Trip To Badstreet U.S.A.: The Rock 'n' Roll Express vs. The Freebirds. Also: Eddie Gilbert, Hogan-Orndorff, Mike Von Erich, Mulligan-Bass.

Dec. 1986: Ric Flair's NWA Title Reign: Last Chance To Silence The Critics! Also: Nikita Koloff, Gilbert & Sting, Hogan-Piper, Abdullah-Adams, Nick Bockwinkel.

Jan. 1987: Bobby Heenan's Bitter Crusade To Destroy Hulk Hogan. Also: Borne & Sawyer, Garvins, Ted DiBiase, Misty Blue Simmes.

Feb. 1987: Tragedy Strikes Wrestling: Magnum T.A. Needs Your Prayers Now More Than Ever. Also: Roberts-Steamboat, Crusher Yurkof, Terry Gordy, Wendell Cooley.

March 1987: Ivan & Khrushchev's Kremlin Orders: Crush Nikita Koloff's Russian Revolution! Also: Barry Windham, One Man Gang, Brian Adias, Savage-Steamboat, Jimmy Snuka.

June 1987: The Hart Foundation vs. The Can-Ams: Special Analysis Of This WWF Superfeud! Also: Nick Bockwinkel, Paul Orndorff, Rhodes & Murdoch, Steve Williams.

July 1987: Missy Hyatt: Will She Kiss And Tell In The WWF? Also: Chris Adams, Hart Foundation, Luger & Horsemen, Nikita-Cornette, Stan Hansen.

Sept. 1987: Independence Day! Also: Hennig-Bockwinkel, Hart Foundation, Kolofts, Bubba Rogers, Missy Hyatt.

Oct. 1987: The Honky Tonk Man Wins The Intercontinental Title: Is Randy Savage The Fans' Last Hope. Also: Kerry Von Erich, Ken Patera, Sting-Gilbert, Horsemen-Freebirds, Zbyszko-Gagne.

Dec. 1987: Hulk Hogan: Will He Be Drowned By The New Wave Of Challengers? Also: Hennig-Lawler, Windham-Steiner, Flair-Williams, Brutus Beefcake, Ronnie Garvin.

Jan. 1988: The Experts Agree: The Road Warriors Will Turn Bad In 1988! Also: Koloff-Taylor, Curt Hennig, Duggan-DiBiase.

Feb. 1988: Ric Flair Admits: "I'm Nothing Without The NWA Belt!" Also: Kerry Von Erich, Jim Cornette, Hogan-Andre, Hennig-Lawler, Terry Taylor.

March 1988: After Four Years As Champion ... Only Hulk Hogan Can Beat Hulk Hogan. Also: Warriors-Demolition, Steve Williams, Luger & Dillon, Calgary, Terry Gordy.

May 1988: Belt Or No Belt ... Hulk Hogan Is Still The People's Champion! Also: Owen Hart, Tatum & Victory, Scott Hall, Madusa Miceli, Luger-Arn.

June 1988: How Sting's War With Ric Flair Could Make Him A Horseman! Also: Bobby Heenan, Martel-Zenk, Kerry-Gordy, Ted DiBiase, Nikita Koloff.

Aug. 1988: World Tag Title Power Shift! Also: Windham & Luger, Demolition, Taylor-Freebirds, Paul Ellering, Owen & Bret.

Oct. 1988: The Fantastics Declare: "We Will Not Share Our Fans With The Rock 'n' Roll Express!" Also: Rhodes-Windham, Curt Hennig, Roberts-Rude, Rougeaus, Jim Garvin.

Jan. 1989: The Horsemen Destroyed! The World Title Gained! But The Midnight Express Must Still Prove Themselves! Also: Top Guns, Hart & Rougeaus, Andre-Savage-Hulk, Terry Gordy, Kevin Von Erich.

March 1989: Scared Stiff! "Don't Say Snake!" Also: Jeff Jarrett, Cactus Jack, Ric Flair, Barn Barn Bigelow, Hercules, Iron Sheik.

April 1989: Hulkamania Runs Wild Again! Can Randy Savage Stop The Onslaught? Also: British Bulldogs, Road Warriors-Sting & Luger, Lawler-Kerry, Andre, Mike Rotundo.

June 1989: Ultimate Warrior's Mission Impossible: Destroy Randy Savage For Hulk Hogan. Also: Rick Steamboat, Rick Martel, Larry Zbyszko, Luger-Windham by Sting, Ric Flair.

July 1989: Dino Bravo: The Man Hulk Hogan Cannot Beat! Also: Flair-Steamboat, Rhodes & Perez, Road Warriors & Ellering, Michael Hayes.

Aug. 1989 (Special Issue): Supercard Sunday! Exclusive Coverage Of WrestleMania V And Clash Of Champions VI. Also: Kerry-Embry, Randy Savage, Great Muta, Ted DiBiase, Teddy Long.

Sept. 1989: Our Urgent Plea To Ric Flair: Don't Wrestle Terry Funk. Also: Demolition, Roddy Piper, Hogan-Zeus, Larry Zbyszko, Jerry Lawler.

Oct. 1989: No Holds Barred! Hogan & Beefcake vs. Savage & Zeus: An Exclusive Preview & Analysis. Also: Eric Embry, Four Horsemen, Teddy Long, Hayes-Luger, Art Barr, Billy Jack Haynes.

Nov. 1989: Roddy Piper Pins Randy Savage ... And Hulk Hogan Is Scared Stiff! Also: Mr. T & Von Erichs, Garvin & Hayes, Flair-T. Funk, Dustin-Steel Man, Sgt. Slaughter.

Jan. 1990: The Hulk Hogan Book Of Lists. Also: Brian Pillman, Rich-Luger, Tully & Arn, P.Y. Chu-Hi, Greg Gagne.

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April 1990: Hulk Hogan: A Decade Of Greatness. Also: Luger-Flair, Woman, Piper-Heenan, Billy Travis, Badd Company.

July 1990: My 10 Challenges To Ric Flair, By Lex Luger. Also: Lanny Poffo, Dusty-Savage, Luger-Flair, Doom, Tully Blanchard.

Aug. 1990: Hogan-Warrior II: You Can Make It Happen. Also: Eric Embry, Demolition, Doom, Larry Zbyszko.

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Oct. 1990: Hulk Hogan vs. Earthquake: Exclusive SummerSlam Preview & Analysis. Also: Ultimate Warrior, Ric Flair, Tommy Rich, Tasmanian Devil, Chris Von Erich.

Feb. 1991: The Incredible "Halloween Havoc Hoax"! Unraveling The Diabolical Plot. Also: Muta-Steamboat, Hogan-Hart, Ultimate Warrior, Cornette & Express, Norman.

March 1991: Warning To The Ultimate Warrior: Roddy Piper Wants You! Also: Gilbert-Jarrett, Cornette & Express, Teddy Long, Survivor Series, Scott Norton.

April 1991: Hulk Hogan: The Challenges That Remain. Also: Ted DiBiase, Skyscrapers, Lex Luger, Tom Zenk, Fabulous Ones.

May 1991: Only Hulk Hogan Can Rid The WWF Of The Stench Of Sgt. Slaughter. Also: Ric Flair, Bobby Eaton, Sheik-Brazil, Power & Glory, Terry Funk.

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Nov. 1991: Lex Luger Wins The Title—But Loses His Fans. Also: Rick Steamboat, Roddy Piper, Global, Diamond Studd, Lawler-Embry.

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Sept. 1992: Hey, Legion Of Doom—Go For The Title Or Go Away! Also: Repo-Crush, Mondo Kleen, Freebirds-Valentine & Taylor, Dangerous Alliance, Moondogs.

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Nov. 1992: WWF Beware! It's The Perfect Time For A Curt Hennig Comeback! Also: Crush, Butch Reed, Sting, Buddy Rogers, Dan Spivey.

Jan. 1993: Sting Turns Sadistic: "Hurting Jake Makes Me Happy!" Also: Anderson & Eaton, Bushwhackers-Moondogs, Ramon-Savage, Natural Disasters, Masa Chono.

Feb. 1993: WWF Champion Bret Hart: His Five Most Dangerous Challenges. Also: Sgt. Slaughter, Steve Austin, Rick Steiner, Bob Backlund, Terry Taylor.

March 1993 (Special Edition): 1992—The Year In Pictures. Also: Madusa-Paul E., Curt Hennig, Davey Boy Smith, Jesse Ventura, Predictions For '93.

April 1993 What's In? What's Out? Also: Razor Ramon, Rick Steamboat, Patriot, Tatanka, Brian Christopher.

May 1993: Sumo Sadism: Will Yokozuna Make His Biggest Splash At WrestleMania? Also: Jim Cornette, Christopher-Jarrett, Benoit-Scorpio, Windham & Rhodes, Hennig-Luger.

Nov. 1993: Bret Hart vs. Lex Luger: It's Not Over Yet! Also: Rude-Dustin, Hulk Hogan, Marty Jannetty, Heavenly Bodies, Tatanka, Sherri Martel.

Jan. 1994: Roasted, Broiled, Fried, Baked ... Any Way You Cook It, Hogan's A Chicken! Also: Rude-Flair, Bagwell & Scorpio, Jim Cornette, Jerry Lawler, Hansen & T. Funk-Abdullah & Sullivan.

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Sept. 1994 (Special Issue): WWF Midyear Report! Also: Big Van Vader, Parker-Hollywood Blonds, Sting-Rude, WWF legal problems, Prince Kharis, Bunkhouse-Rhodes, Public Enemy.

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Winter 1995: Exclusive Preview: Sting vs. Hogan: This Time It's For Real! Also: Steiners, Yankem-Undertaker, Bodies-Cornette, Arn Anderson.

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Holiday 1996: WCW Shocker: Randy Savage Is Set To Join Hulk Hogan's NWO! Also: Steve Austin, Michaels-Goldust, Arn Anderson, Van Dam-Sabu, Steve Williams.

Jan. 1997: It Could Happen! Hogan's Next Move ... Buy WCW! Also: Undertaker, New Jack, Owen-Bulldog, Ted DiBiase.

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April 1998: "We've Won!" Maybe ... But Can The NWO Handle Its Own Success? Also: Ken Shamrock, Steiners-Warriors, Douglas & Francine, Rocky Maivia.

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June 1998: Hollywood Hogan: 10 More Dirty Deeds ... And Then He's Outta Here! Also: DeGeneration X, Jim Cornette, Randy Savage, yesterday and today.

July 1998: Death Wish! Costing Hogan The Title Isn't Enough For The Macho Man: What's Next? Also: Ric Flair, Headbangers-Rock 'n' Rolls, Chris Chetti, Mero & Sable.

Aug. 1998: We Stand Behind Ya, Vince! It's Time To Fire Austin. Also: Luna-Sable, Randy Savage, Dean Malenko, Super 8 tourney.

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Nov. 2000: Special Fear Issue—Rock-Benoit, Ric Flair, HBK. Also: ECW mid-year report, Bill Goldberg.

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April 2005: PPV Revolution: How Taboo Tuesday & Victory Road Changed Wrestling Forever. Also: Eddie Guerrero, Jushin Liger, Edge-Benoit, Kane-Snitsky, TNA vs. ROH, Heyman & Heidenreich, Charlie Haas, WWE pink slips.

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PRO Wrestling ILLUSTRATED
Who's Number One?
PWI 500
Ranking The Top 500 Stars In Wrestling!
Visit Our New Web Site At www.pwi-online.com

Three things are certain in this world: death, taxes, and the annual "*PWI* 500" provoking mailbags full of letters from readers.

Of course, part of the fun of our yearly ranking is the passionate debates it creates. Just ask these readers ...

"Are you kidding me? Homicide at 158, behind Viscera and Chris Masters? You guys must have rocks in your head," wrote Sean Donnal of Hamlin, West Virginia.

"Satoshi Kojima wins the two most historic championships in Japan—an unprecedented event—and gets listed behind Batista and Cena? What does it take for a Japanese wrestler to score the top spot?" wrote Brandon Thompson of Hollins, Virginia.

Some success in the U.S. wouldn't hurt, Brandon. John King of Fishkill, New York, was more in line with our editors' thinking, but he would have flip-flopped the top spots.

"I understand why you ranked Batista ahead of Cena," he e-mailed, "but ever since Cena moved to Raw and Batista was banished to Smackdown, the fortunes of those two champions have been reversed. Cena is on the rise, while Batista is fading."

D-VON, CALL A LAWYER!

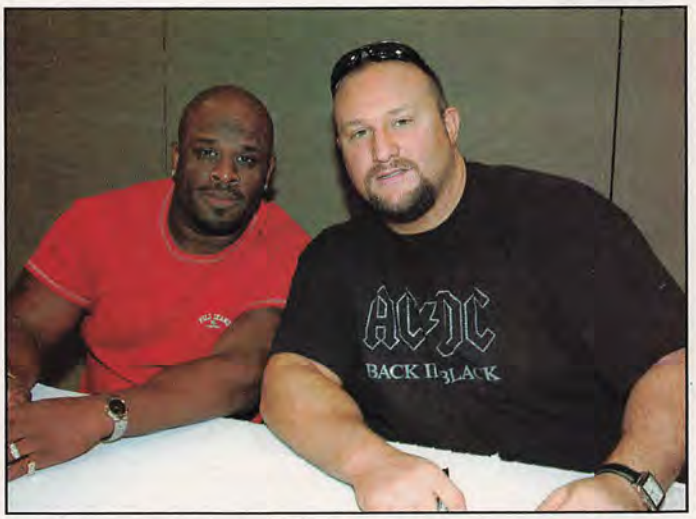
WWE crossed the line when it forced The Dudley Boyz to change their ring name and image. Vince McMahon keeps saying he doesn't consider TNA to be a threat, but then he has his attorneys try to prevent his former stars from competing there using their established names. It sounds to me like McMahon might be a little more afraid of TNA than he lets on.

The thing that really bugs me about the Dudley situation is that WWE let Buh Buh and D-Von leave. WWE Creative had no ideas for one of the greatest tag teams of the past decade and let them go just weeks after the Dudleys headlined the One Night Stand pay-per-view.

So what are Buh Buh and D-Von supposed to do? Are they supposed to just ride off into the sunset because WWE's hack—er, I mean crack—team of writers couldn't find anything for them? They were laid off, so they found a job elsewhere. Then WWE tried to prevent them from making a living by robbing them of the personae they created.

Is that any way to treat two loyal employees who have been responsible for two Matches of the Year (2000 and 2001)? That's one more than Triple-H ever won, I might add.

MANNY REY
Brush Prairie, WA



The Dudley Boyz can't be The Dudley Boyz anymore, thanks to WWE. Reader Manny Rey believes Vince McMahon went too far in refusing to let Buh Buh Ray and D-Von use their famous names elsewhere.

PETTY WOULD BE PROUD

I know there has been a lot of talk recently about IWA Mid-South shutting down, but after watching this year's fantastic Ted Petty Invitational Tournament, I hope the promotion has a long future ahead of it.

The tournament was one of the best independent cards I've ever attended. Held over two days in Hammond, Indiana, the event featured such standout talent as Alex Shelley, Kevin Steen, Chris Sabin, Chris Hero, and the tournament winner, Matt Sydal.

In my opinion, Sydal is going to be one of wrestling's big breakthrough stars in the next year. He is an electric performer with a tremendous move set. His win over Sabin saw him counter Sabin's vaunted Future shock finisher into a quick rollup for the pinfall. That shows tremendous poise and ring generalship from a young wrestler who is only going to improve.

And IWA Mid-South champion Jimmy Jacobs deserves credit for defending his title on back-to-back nights, scoring wins over Colt Cabana and Mickie Knuckles.

Thank you, IWA Mid-South, for present-

ing wrestling as it is supposed to be.

JANET RAYVOWICZ
Hammond, IN

PROPS FOR KENTA

This year's "*PWI* 500" was pretty good. I thought that most of the rankings were fair and accurate assessments of each wrestler's current standing in the business. I was especially pleased to see KENTA, who has electrified NOAH fans since the promotion's inception, take a ranking of 65 after being left off the list for a number of years. I definitely believe that KENTA is the top cruiserweight in the world today.

MIKE BUECKERT
dreadnaught114141@yahoo.ca

RETROGRADE PLANET JARRETT

Two steps forward, three steps back.

That seems to be the plan of TNA these days. It lands a national cable deal, then robs Raven of the NWA title and puts it back around Jeff Jarrett's waist before *Impact* even goes on the air on Spike TV.

It brings in Samoa Joe and positions him as a strong contender to the NWA title. Then it brings back Kevin Nash and slaps him right into the main event picture.

I truly want to see TNA succeed. I consider myself a WWE fan, but WWE doesn't care so much about wrestling anymore. The shows are all about drama and comedy, like a cheesy sitcom. TNA has the opportunity to become an alternative to the junk WWE force-feeds us. But TNA management seems obsessed with becoming the next WCW, trotting out characters who are long past their prime and putting a glass ceiling over the exciting young wrestlers who could take the company to the next level.

As long as TNA remains a vanity project for the Jarrett family, it's always going to be a second-rate promotion. TNA management has to recognize that and stop moving backward.

RYAN BELTZ
Scottsdale, AZ

MORE WORLDLY FLAVOR

I have been reading your publications since the 1980s and they are the best, but I have to cringe when I see articles about what Trish needs to do for the women's division, and then see you write that she needs competition from Japan.

Maybe you've forgotten, but the last WWE women's champion that *begged* for competition from Japan ended up throwing the title belt in the garbage on national cable television. Madusa begged Vince for Japanese women wrestlers, and each one that was brought over (Bull Nakano, Monster Ripper, Aja Kong) *destroyed* her.

It also bothers me that, aside from two pages a month, there is nothing in your magazines about Mexican wrestling, and very little about Japanese competition. Those "International Reports" are divided among the Caribbean, Mexican, Japanese, Canadian, and the United Kingdom scenes. Apparently, if an uneducated fan read your magazines, it would seem the only wrestling in the world was in the U.S.

A wrestler in AAA in Mexico named Mistico recently won the NWA middleweight title, but I don't think we will ever see it mentioned in your magazines. I was surprised to see that you mentioned that Intocable had his back/neck broken, which I have to applaud you for, because if it wasn't for that one paragraph in one of your recent magazines, I wouldn't have known that. Please focus more on federations besides WWE, TNA, and the independents. There's a whole world full of wrestling federations out there that deserve coverage—mainly AAA and CMLL.

TIM SULLIVAN
Bergenfield, NJ □

The fact that TNA chose to revisit the Kevin Nash-Jeff Jarrett feud upon debuting on Spike TV didn't please Ryan Beltz. He'd like to see TNA focus on stars of the future.

PWI Hotline Extra!

Your answers to our question of the week!

Question of the Week: Who do you think will be number one in the 2006 "*PWI* 500"? (October 3 to 9, 2005)

Hotline callers respond: "Right now I'd consider John Cena the favorite," said James McNeil of Depew, New York. "So long as Cena doesn't collapse like Randy Orton last year, he should be WWE's franchise player for years to come."

"I hate to say it, but probably Triple-H," responded Eric Connally of Chicopee, Massachusetts. "He has a way of always climbing back to the top. I know better than to doubt him."

"This is based more on what I'd like to see rather than what I think will happen, but I'd love to see Chris Daniels get the top spot," said Craig Allwes of Sutton, Ontario. "Dean Malenko got the nod in 1994, so maybe you guys will recognize the top pure wrestler in the game again in 2006."

PWI official ratings

For period ended October 14, 2005

TOP 10

1. **BATISTA**
   318, Washington, DC
   (2) World champion
2. **JOHN CENA**
   260, West Newbury, MA
   (1) WWE champion
3. **KURT ANGLE**
   233, Pittsburgh, PA
   (3) No. 1 contender: WWE title
4. **SATOSHI KOJIMA**
   223, Tokyo, Japan
   (4) All-Japan Triple Crown champion
5. **CHRIS BENOIT**
   224, Edmonton, Alberta
   (5) WWE U.S. champion
6. **SHAWN MICHAELS**
   217, San Antonio, TX
   (8) No. 2 contender: WWE title
7. **BROCK LESNAR**
   297, Minneapolis, MN
   (-) IWGP heavyweight champion
8. **JEFF JARRETT**
   230, Nashville, TN
   (-) NWA heavyweight champion
9. **TAKESHI RIKIOH**
   286, Sakurai, Japan
   (-) GHC heavyweight champion
10. **BRYAN DANIELSON**
    185, Aberdeen, WA
    (-) Ring of Honor champion

Takeshi Rikioh

TAG TEAMS

1. **ROAD WARRIOR ANIMAL & HEIDENREICH**
   Combined weight: 591 pounds
   (1) WWE Smackdown tag team champions
2. **NAOMICHI MARUFUJI & MINORU SUZUKI**
   Combined weight: 429 pounds
   (4) GHC tag team champions
3. **LANCE CADE & TREVOR MURDOCH**
   Combined weight: 513 pounds
   (7) WWE Raw tag team champions
4. **CHRIS HARRIS & JAMES STORM**
   Combined weight: 516 pounds
   (-) NWA tag team champions
5. **SHINSUKE NAKAMURA & HIROSHI TANAHASHI**
   Combined weight: 477 pounds
   (8) IWGP International tag tam champions
6. **ANDY DOUGLAS & CHASE STEVENS**
   Combined weight: 444 pounds
   (6) No. 1 contenders: NWA tag title
7. **JOEY MERCURY & JOHNNY NITRO**
   Combined weight: 417 pounds
   (5) No. 1 contenders: WWE Smackdown tag title
8. **THE HURRICANE & ROSEY**
   Combined weight: 570 pounds
   (3) No. 1 contenders: WWE Raw tag title
9. **JAMAL & TAIYO KEA**
   Combined weight: 591 pounds
   (2) All-Japan International tag team champions
10. **TEAM 3D**
    Combined weight: 587 pounds
    (-) No. 2 contenders: NWA tag title

WWE RAW

WWE Champion:
JOHN CENA
(C) 260, West Newbury, MA

1—**KURT ANGLE**
(1) 233, Pittsburgh, PA
2—**SHAWN MICHAELS**
(2) 217, San Antonio, TX
3—**RIC FLAIR**
(-) 243, Charlotte, NC
4—**EDGE**
(4) 240, Toronto, Ontario
5—**THE BIG SHOW**
(6) 485, Aiken, SC
6—**TRIPLE-H**
(-) 274, Greenwich, CT
7—**CARLITO CARIBBEAN COOL**
(3) 220, San Juan, Puerto Rico
8—**CHRIS MASTERS**
(5) 270, Santa Monica, CA
9—**ROB CONWAY**
(10) 240, Pittsburgh, PA
10—**SHELTON BENJAMIN**
(9) 245, Spartanburg, SC

WWE SMACKDOWN

World Champion:
BATISTA
(C) 318, Washington, DC

1—**CHRIS BENOIT**
(1) 224, Edmonton, Alberta
2—**EDDIE GUERRERO**
(5) 223, El Paso, TX
3—**RANDY ORTON**
(3) 265, St. Louis, MO
4—**BOOKER T**
(7) 250, Houston, TX
5—**JOHN B. LAYFIELD**
(2) 306, Roscoe, TX
6—**THE UNDERTAKER**
(6) 304, Dallas, TX
7—**REY MISTERIO JR.**
(4) 163, San Diego, CA
8—**KEN KENNEDY**
(8) 225, Minneapolis, MN
9—**BOBBY LASHLEY**
(-) 255, Topeka, KS
10—**JUVENTUD GUERRERA**
(-) 169, Mexico City, Mexico

OVW

OVW Champion:
JOHNNY JETER
(C) 218, San Diego, CA

1—**KEN DOANE**
(1) 210, Louisville, KY
2—**BRENT ALBRIGHT**
(2) 230, Tulsa, OK
3—**BOBBY LASHLEY**
(5) 255, Topeka, KS
4—**DEUCE SHADE**
(8) 230, Fiji Islands
5—**AARON STEVENS**
(9) 237, Boston, MA
6—**ELIJAH BURKE**
(10) 230, Jacksonville, FL
7—**C.M. PUNK**
(-) 220, Chicago, IL
8—**CHRIS CAGE**
(7) 220, Youngstown, OH
9—**DEAN VISK**
(-) 275, Pittsburgh, PA
10—**SETH SKYFIRE**
(-) 224, Louisville, KY

RING OF HONOR

ROH Champion:
BRYAN DANIELSON
(-) 185, Aberdeen, WA

1—**NIGEL McGUINNESS**
(1) 220, London, England
2—**RODERICK STRONG**
(-) 205, Tampa, FL
3—**CHRISTOPHER DANIELS**
(3) 210, Los Angeles, CA
4—**SAMOA JOE**
(2) 270, American Samoa
5—**COLT CABANA**
(6) 235, Chicago, IL
6—**HOMICIDE**
(7) 220, Brooklyn, NY
7—**A.J. STYLES**
(4) 202, Gainesville, GA
8—**STEVE CORINO**
(-) 225, Sea Isle City, NJ
9—**AUSTIN ARIES**
(9) 202, Milwaukee, WI
10—**JAY LETHAL**
(-) 192, Elizabeth, NJ

Top 10 and Tag Team ratings are based on won-lost records for the past month, quality of opposition, and inherent skill of each wrestler or team. These ratings are compiled by the magazine's editorial board. All other ratings are based on the official current positions of challengers to the top title in each category; certain titleholders receive an automatic spot in the ratings. The number in parentheses indicates a wrestler's position in that category last issue; (-) indicates that the wrestler was not rated in that category last issue. while (C) indicates the wrestler was champion in that category last issue.

AWA SUPREME CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING: Champion—Billy Maverick; **1**—Kliff Hanger; **2**—Eric Draven; **3**—Chris Blayze; **4**—Fudd; **5**—Nic Noble; **6**—Jack Black; **7**—Robert Royale; **8**—T-Dogg; **9**—Chris Morrus; **10**—Dynamite Derrick.

BAD 2 THE BONE WRESTLING: Champion—Vic the Bruiser; **1**—J.C. Bailey; **2**—Simon Sezz; **3**—Real Sexxy; **4**—Todd Morton; **5**—Billy Black; **6**—Randy Royal; **7**—Billy Maverick; **8**—K-Lo; **9**—Max Mizzery; **10**—Brent Goodin.

EAST COAST WRESTLING ASSOCIATION: Champion—Scotty Charisma; **1**—Chase Del Monte; **2**—Freak Nasty; **3**—Cheetah Master; **4**—Mike Kruel; **5**—Andrew Ryker; **6**—Mr. Ooh La La; **7**—Mega; **8**—Fred Sampson; **9**—Aden Chambers; **10**—Shawn Patrick.

EXODUS WRESTLING ALLIANCE: Champion—Jason Jones; **1**—George South Sr.; **2**—Ethan Cage; **3**—Rick Morton; **4**—New Breed; **5**—Mike Lee; **6**—Baddstreet; **7**—Guerrero I; **8**—Cruel Connection II; **9**—Gary Royal; **10**—Jimmy Jack Funk Jr.

FORT MEADE WRESTLING: Champion—Title Vacant; **1**—Jerry Lawler; **2**—Kip James; **3**—The Bruiser; **4**—The Patriot; **5**—Josh Daniels; **6**—Marcus Jordan; **7**—Axl Rotten; **8**—Romeo Valentino; **9**—Ruckus; **10**—Andrew Ryker.

MILLENNIUM WRESTLING FEDERATION: Champion—Dylan Cage; **1**—Eddie Edwards; **2**—Todd Hansen; **3**—Gino Martino; **4**—Jimmy Cash; **5**—Danny Jaxx; **6**—Kamala; **7**—Tiger Mulligan; **8**—Beau Douglas; **9**—Slyk Wagner Brown; **10**—The Outpatient.

NORTHWIND CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING: Champion—Tiger Allen; **1**—Bobby Bass; **2**—Terry Alan; **3**—Sweet Daddy Cain; **4**—Shane Michaels; **5**—Maddawg; **6**—Bombay Warrior; **7**—James Jackson; **8**—Yatsu; **9**—Jason Strong; **10**—Eric Strong.

NWA BLUEGRASS: Champion—Vinnie Viagra; **1**—Chance Prophet; **2**—Eric Darkstorm; **3**—Billy Maverick; **4**—J.T. Money; **5**—David Young; **6**—Chris Draven; **7**—Chad Collyer; **8**—Sonny Siaki; **9**—Jake Layton; **10**—The Rebel.

PRO WRESTLING EXPRESS: Champion—Scottie Gash; **1**—Eric Extasy; **2**—Chris Taylor; **3**—Devin Devine; **4**—Devil Bhudakahn; **5**—Justin Idol; **6**—Nikita Allanov; **7**—Daron Smythe; **8**—Bigg; **9**—Seth James; **10**—Crusher Hansen.

SUMMIT WRESTLING ASSOCIATION: Champion—Nikolai Volkoff; **1**—Leslie Leatherman; **2**—Shawn Patrick; **3**—Joseph Brooks; **4**—Steve the Teacher; **5**—Chucky Wynn; **6**—Tank Thomas; **7**—Lance McIntyre; **8**—C.A. Elliott; **9**—Hyjinx; **10**—Shane McIntyre.

ULTIMATE CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING: Champion—Jeff Crowe; **1**—Terry England; **2**—Doug Vines; **3**—Justin Sane; **4**—J.D. Thunder; **5**—Rowdy Red; **6**—Hades; **7**—Jack Daniels; **8**—Kid Dynamite; **9**—Terry Alan; **10**—Blue Angel.

WORLD XTREME WRESTLING: Champion—Bison Bravado; **1**—Havoc; **2**—Samu; **3**—D.J. Hyde; **4**—Sinister X; **5**—Sugaa; **6**—Rockin' Rebel; **7**—Tommy Suede; **8**—Greg Matthews; **9**—Slugger; **10**—L.A. Smooth.

NWA

NWA Champion:
JEFF JARRETT
(7) 230, Nashville, TN

1—A.J. STYLES
(4) 202, Gainesville, GA
2—RHINO
(1) 275, Detroit, MI
3—ABYSS
(3) 295, Cincinnati, OH
4—RAVEN
(C) 243, Short Hills, NJ
5—JEFF HARDY
(–) 212, Cameron, NC
6—SAMOA JOE
(2) 270, American Samoa
7—CHRISTOPHER DANIELS
(5) 210, Los Angeles, CA
8—TOMMY MARR
(–) 215, St. Petersburg, FL
9—RICKY MURDOCH
(–) 261, Houston, TX
10—MONTY BROWN
(–) 268, Detroit, MI

TNA

NWA Champion:
JEFF JARRETT
(6) 230, Nashville, TN

1—A.J. STYLES
(4) 202, Gainesville. GA
2—KEVIN NASH
(–) 311, Detroit, MI
3—CHRISTOPHER DANIELS
(1) 210, Los Angeles, CA
4—MONTY BROWN
(9) 68, Detroit, MI
5—RHINO
(2) 275, Detroit, MI
6—RAVEN
(C) 243, Short Hills, NJ
7—ABYSS
(5) 295, Cincinnati, OH
8—SAMOA JOE
(3) 275, American Samoa
9—JEFF HARDY
(–) 212, Cameron, NC
10—CHRIS SABIN
(–) 207, Detroit, MI

JAPAN

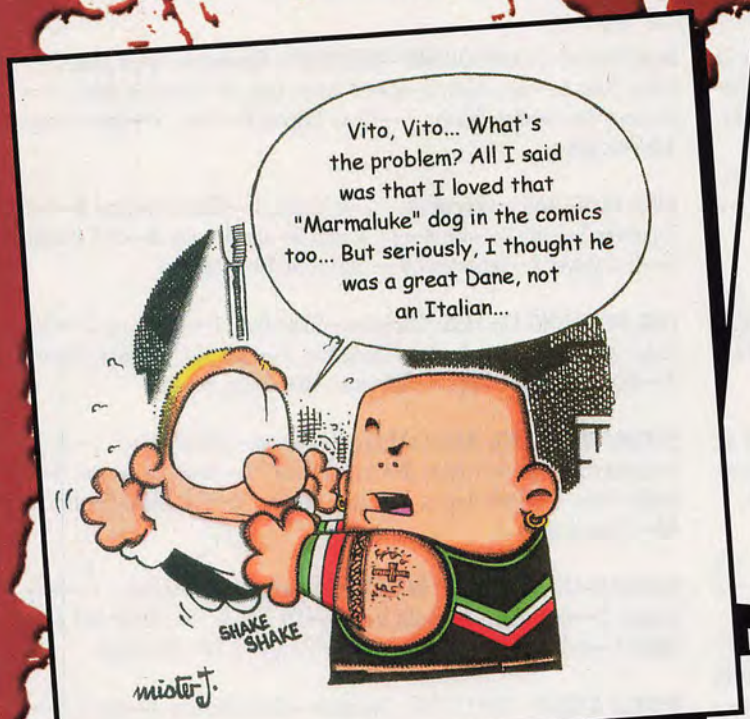
1—SATOSHI KOJIMA
(1) 223, Tokyo, Japan
All-Japan Triple Crown champion
2—BROCK LESNAR
(–) 297, Minneapolis, MN
IWGP heavyweight champion
3—TAKESHI RIKIOH
(3) 286, Sakurai, Japan
GHC heavyweight champion
4—KAZUYUKI FUJITA
(2) 253, Funabashi, Japan
5—KENTA KOBASHI
(6) 282, Fukuchiyama, Japan
6—BLACK TIGER
(–) 175, Havana, Cuba
7—KEIJI MUTO
(7) 245, Yamanashi, Japan
8—MASA CHONO
(4) 235, Tokyo, Japan
9—SHINJIRO OTANI
(–) 215, Yokohama, Japan
10—TIGER MASK IV
(5) 170, Uruyasu, Japan

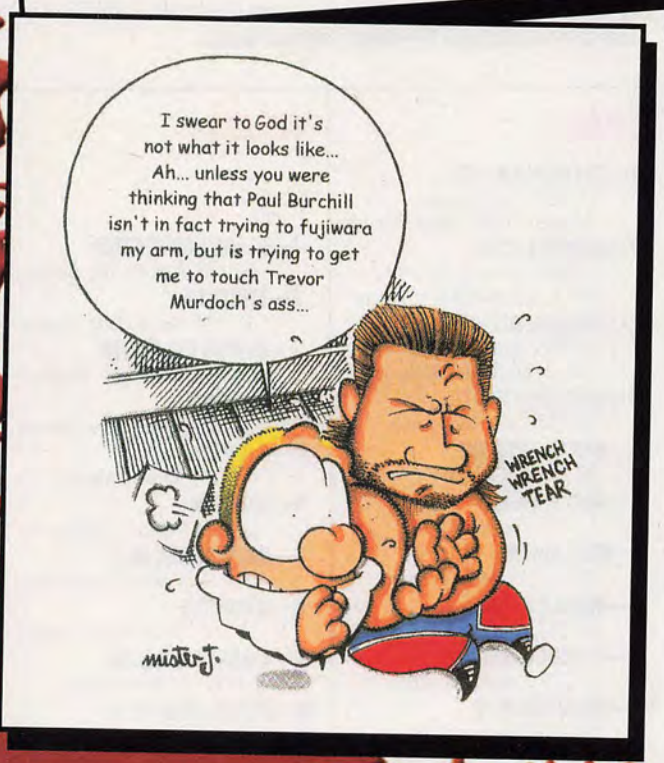
MEXICO

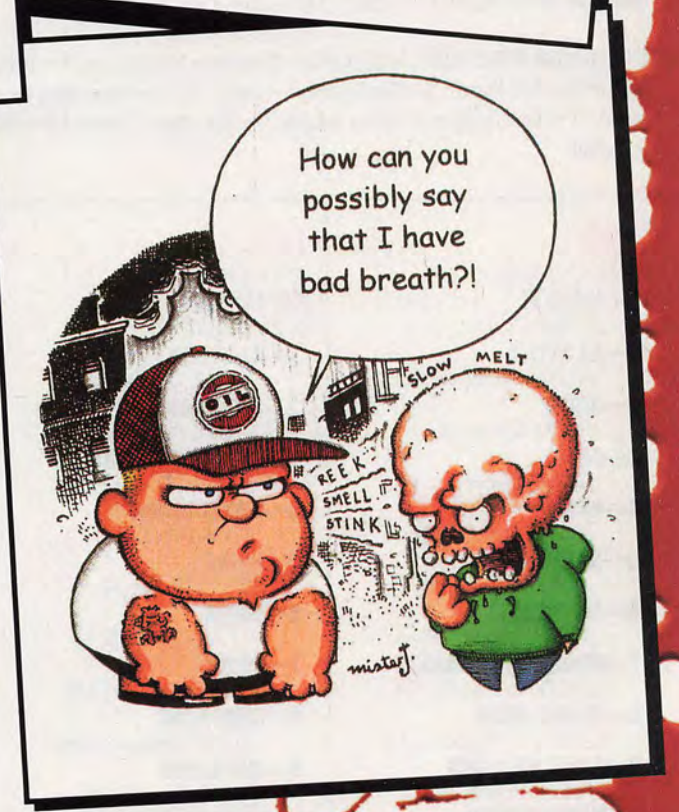
1—ULTIMO GUERRERO
(9) 173, Mexico City, Mexico
2—MISTICO
(8) 194, Mexico City, Mexico
3—EL HIJO DEL SANTO
(1) 180, Tulancingo, Mexico
4—SHOCKER
(–) 185, Guadalajara, Mexico
5—L.A. PARK
(5) 235, Torreon, Mexico
6—KONNAN
(–) 235, Mexico City, Mexico
7—DR. WAGNER JR.
(3) 215, Mexico City, Mexico
8—ATLANTIS
(2) 180, Guadalajara, Mexico
9—CHARLY MANSON
(–) 180, Torreon, Mexico
10—PERRO AGUAYO JR.
(7) 165, Zacatecas, Mexico

Drawing Blood

By Jason Conlan


Vito, Vito... What's the problem? All I said was that I loved that "Marmaluke" dog in the comics too... But seriously, I thought he was a great Dane, not an Italian...
SHAKE SHAKE
mister J.


I swear to God it's not what it looks like... Ah... unless you were thinking that Paul Burchill isn't in fact trying to fujiwara my arm, but is trying to get me to touch Trevor Murdoch's ass...
WRENCH WRENCH TEAR
mister J.



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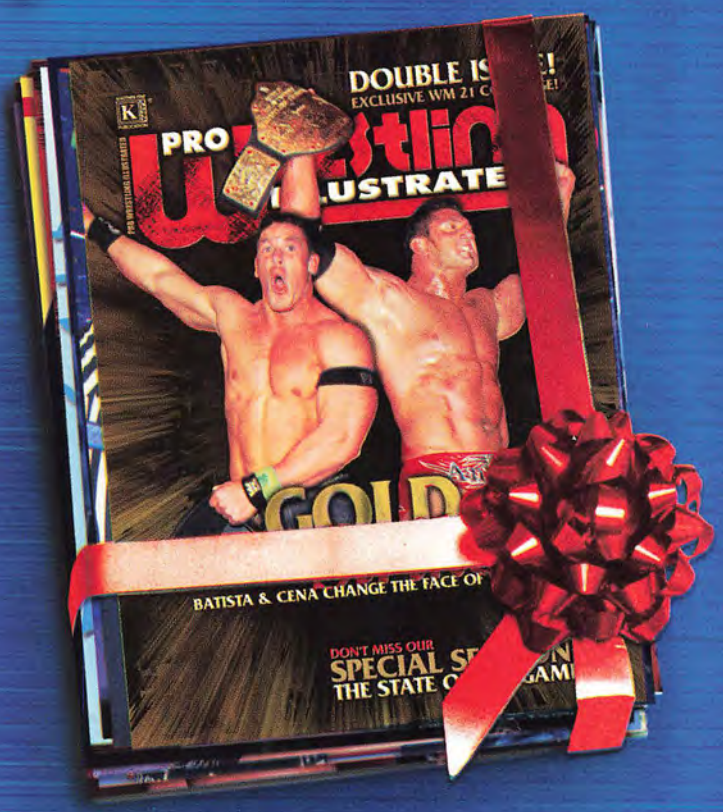

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